



Language Immersion Education
a training manual for early years

Áine Andrews

Two Windows on the World

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Gach ceart ar cosaint. Ní ceadmhach aon chuid den fhoilseachán seo a atáirgeadh, a chur i gcomhad athfhála, ná a tharchur ar aon bhealach ná slí, bíodh sin leictreonach, meicniúil, bunaithe ar fhótachóipeáil. ar thaifeadadh nó eile, gan cead a fháil roimh ré ón fhoilsitheoir.

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Author Profile

Áine Andrews established the first language immersion preschool in Northern Ireland in 1978, and has been active in Irish-medium education ever since at both preschool and primary level. She has a degree in Celtic from Queen's University Belfast, and trained as a primary schoolteacher in Wales. While teaching in the English-medium sector she gained postgraduate qualifications in nursery education, making a special study of second language immersion programmes in Canada and Wales.

She has lectured on language immersion education in Ireland, Scotland, France and the USA, and has published papers on the subject for the Fryske Academy in the Netherlands. She has been involved in statutory curriculum initiatives relevant to the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland. She has also developed a basic reading scheme for the sector along with numerous other teaching resources.

Since 1988 she has acted as an advisor for the Irish-medium preschool sector, originally with the Dublin-based An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta and latterly for Altram, the Irish-medium early years organisation in Northern Ireland, of which she was a founder member. Recently, she drafted new material for UK-wide National Occupational Standards aimed at staff in early years language immersion settings.

At present she is Principal of Gaelscoil na bhFál, an Irish-medium school in Belfast, with its own nursery unit. In 2000, she was nominated as a Director of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the Council for Irish-medium Education in Northern Ireland established by the Department of Education.

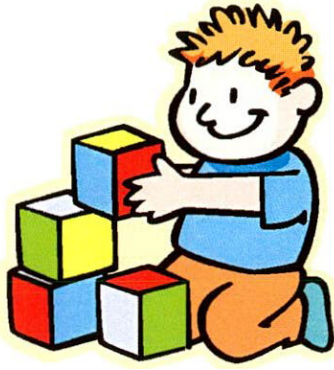
Dedication

This publication is dedicated to those who pioneered Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland, and to those whose commitment has sustained it over the years.

FOREWORD



Foreword



Who will benefit from the material

This course has been developed to support the training needs of those who work in early years language immersion settings. It is directed in particular at the preschool setting in which children are being prepared for a language immersion primary education, but its use is not restricted to preschool staff. Many of the techniques outlined here are highly relevant to teachers in the early years of language immersion primary schools.

The contents also offer valuable insights to other staff within a language immersion setting. Those whose role it is to consolidate and extend the foundation laid by their colleagues in early years can only benefit from understanding the earlier educational experiences of the children in their charge. In addition, when they themselves are addressing new areas of language, some of the techniques outlined in this document need to be reactivated.

The materials in this course will also be of benefit to training organizations and agencies who play a role in supporting the improvement of provision within a language immersion sector.

The language immersion education sector is comparatively new, and there are many decision makers within educational agencies who have no theoretical background in or practical experience of this type of education. It is hoped that this publication will offer insights and understanding to those who are responsible for monitoring and evaluating all levels of immersion language education, and those who have a role to play in developing educational policy.

What is language immersion

Language immersion can be described as a system of education where children are taught through a language which is not that of the home. Immersion education usually happens in a situation where more than one language

community exists in close proximity, and where one of the languages in question is in decline or under threat from a stronger or more vigorous language neighbour. Language immersion education is used as a protective or restorative measure to stop or reverse language shift.

Language immersion may constitute a positive, constructive measure in government language planning policy, as in French-Canada or Wales. Sometimes, as with Breton, Catalan, or Irish, it might arise as a consequence of community or parental action, attracting varying degrees of hostility, apathy, tolerance, recognition or support from within the broader community or from statutory agencies.

Who attends language immersion education programmes and why

Children who attend language immersion education programmes usually come from homes in which a dominant language is the language of communication. The parents of these children have chosen language immersion education for them because they themselves have a strong sense of affinity with the cultural and linguistic values it represents. While they often do not know the language themselves, they usually wish their children to learn it, to develop a sense of identity that is related to it, and, possibly, to participate in and to avail of opportunities which had been denied to themselves.

Why the materials have been created

The movement for language immersion education began to develop momentum during the sixties and seventies. Minority language activists promoted the case for language immersion programmes, basing their arguments on two main theoretical assumptions. One was the innate predisposition of children to learn languages, as evidenced by their acquisition of their home language. The second claim was that young children are superior to adults in their ability to learn languages. The latter claim was evidenced by studies undertaken during this period on the processes of brain development and maturation. Research findings from French immersion projects in Canada added substantially to the credibility of the movement.

Subsequent theories of language learning have challenged the case for the innate superior ability of young children, and emphasized the importance of environment in language learning. There has also been considerable debate on how far research findings on the language immersion education of one language community can be transposed *en bloc* to immersion projects in another language community. Some experts argue that no language situation can be interpreted without reference to a range of environmental and macro-factors.

However, the values and perception of the early proponents of immersion education continue to hold sway in the popular mythology. Simplistic perceptions of the challenges involved in early years immersion language proliferate. There is widespread belief that immersion language learning in the early years setting is a simple, straightforward, uncomplicated process and that children absorb the language merely by being exposed to it. This leads very quickly to the assumption that a systematic approach, or deliberate strategies, or additional skills on the part of the staff beyond an ability to speak the immersion language, are unnecessary and superfluous to success.



These misconceptions permeate the attitudes of service providers both within and outside the immersion language sector. Within the sector, there tends to be a greater concern with developing staff language skills than with methodology. Often, there is a belief that the skills in methodology needed by staff can be met simply by translating material designed for a home language situation, or delivering courses designed for a home language situation through the medium of the immersion language. Outside the sector, service providers tend towards an even more reductive version of this syndrome, assuming that the only difference between the home language situation and an immersion language situation lies in the language used by staff. For them, the immersion language setting is a bolt-on to a home language situation, their perception of quality informed, almost exclusively, by a home language template.

Home language early years settings and immersion language early years settings do, indeed, have much in common. Child care issues are the same. The general principles underpinning the provision of a quality learning environment are the same. However, staff in an immersion setting require additional skills and competencies. These skills and competencies are of a high order. Staff also need to have a firm knowledge base relating to the processes of language learning, including contemporary research findings.

These materials are an attempt to address more appropriately the specific additional training needs of early years language immersion staff by:

1. identifying the fundamental principles of good practice in promoting effective immersion language learning
2. describing factors which contribute to effective immersion language learning
3. providing relevant knowledge and information
4. examining challenges which arise from immersion language learning
5. delineating assignments to evaluate current practice and consolidate learning

Contents

The materials comprise three units. Each unit is divided into a number of sections. Unit 1 is of benefit to all staff who work in an early years language immersion setting – voluntary workers, support staff or staff with supervisory or leadership responsibilities. Unit 2 and 3 are of particular importance to those with supervisory or leadership responsibilities.

Unit 1: Contributing to the provision of an effective language immersion environment

Sections:

1. participating in maximising exposure to the immersion language
2. supporting the development of children's ability to understand the immersion language

3. supporting the emergence of children's ability to speak the immersion language
4. contributing to the planning and implementation of immersion language activities
5. promoting and maintaining the interest, motivation and emotional well-being of children in an immersion setting

Unit 2: Planning, implementing and evaluating the provision of an effective language immersion environment

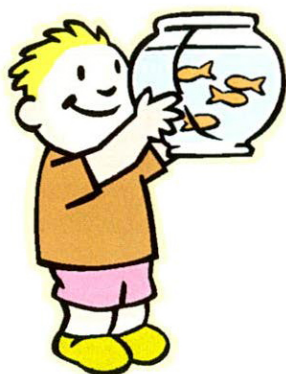
Sections:

1. planning for immersion language learning, using relevant frameworks and guidance
2. planning and organising the physical environment to optimise children's immersion language learning
3. planning and implementing specific activities and experiences to promote children's immersion language learning
4. monitoring and evaluating activities and experiences to promote children's immersion language learning

Unit 3: Facilitating families' involvement in the development and consolidation of their child's language immersion learning experiences

Sections:

1. promoting families' confidence in language immersion education and its value to children's learning and development
2. encouraging the use of the immersion language in the home setting



Some notes on terminology and context

Language immersion projects take place in a variety of diverse cultural, linguistic, ethnic, political and educational *milieux*. I have attempted to facilitate broad access to these materials across a range of language communities. To avoid confusion

in the area of terminology or any affront to cultural or political sensitivities, I have used the term 'home language' to refer to the language of communication in the home rather than the terms 'first language' 'mother tongue' 'mother language' 'native language'. The language of instruction is not named. I have used the term 'immersion language' to refer to the language of instruction or of staff usage rather than 'second language' or 'target language'.

There are, of course, a wide variety of contexts for language immersion settings, and it would be quite impossible to provide guidance for every kind of linguistic mix and linguistic environment. This material concentrates on one particular context. It makes two assumptions: firstly, that the children will have little exposure to the immersion language outside the setting; and, secondly, that they have had little or no contact with the immersion language before they enrolled in the setting. In this context, the children's acquisition of the immersion language will depend entirely on the staff in the early years setting.

However, where children have substantial exposure to the immersion language outside the confines of the setting, the wider environment provides considerable support to the work of the staff. In this context, it may not be necessary to apply the methodologies outlined in these materials with the same rigour.

Immersion language projects often attract children for whom the language of the immersion setting is in fact their home language. Technically these children are not involved in an immersion language education but in a home language education. Their language needs are different from other children in the setting. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that the established language skills of these children could be diluted or undermined by the over-riding language usage of other children within the setting. Thus they present a different challenge to staff in the planning and implementation of strategies to consolidate and enrich existing language skills. This challenge is not addressed specifically in these materials

although general principles of good practice in providing opportunities for quality language learning may be extrapolated from them.

There are some illustrations of language use in the following pages. Examples of home language use are presented using plain text while examples of immersion language use are presented in bold. I have made the presumption that the home language is English and the immersion language is Irish.

UNIT ONE



CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROVISION OF AN EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE IMMERSION ENVIRONMENT

- 1: Participating in maximising exposure to the immersion language**
- 2: Supporting the development of children's ability to understand the immersion language**
- 3: Supporting the emergence of children's ability to speak the immersion language**
- 4: Contributing to the planning and implementation of immersion language activities**
- 5: Promoting and maintaining the interest, motivation and emotional well-being of children in an immersion setting**

Unit 1

Contributing to the provision of an effective language immersion environment



What this unit is about

Children learn language by hearing it spoken. This unit is about contributing to the creation and maintenance of an environment in which children are surrounded by the language which they are learning, and where children hear the new language being spoken constantly to themselves and others.

This unit considers those factors which contribute most effectively to the creation of a quality language environment. It looks at the stages children go through in learning a new language. It describes what you need to do in order to talk to children in ways which are beneficial to their language learning and how working closely with colleagues can improve the quality of the language learning environment. This unit refers to the issue of planning for language learning, drawing attention to your own role in being familiar with the content of the language programme.

What you should be able to do and understand

When you have completed this unit you should be informed about your role in contributing to the provision of an effective language environment. You should know the importance of:

- using the immersion language at all times
- speaking the immersion language naturally and frequently with children in a variety of activities
- maintaining a high level of verbal interaction with children in all activities
- maintaining a sustained flow of language with children
- cooperating with colleagues in providing opportunities to use language with children
- providing clues which will help children understand what you are saying
- using a simplified register of immersion language
- using strategies to increase exposure to key language areas

- using coherent strategies to help children remember key language
- building up children's familiarity with key language areas systematically
- providing children with opportunities to say things in the immersion language
- responding appropriately to children's attempts to use the immersion language
- making useful contributions to language planning
- carrying out your role in implementing a language plan
- promoting children's' enjoyment and success

You should know the importance of understanding:

- the stages children go through in learning a new language
- the characteristic features of the simple language register used with young children in the early stages of home language learning
- the factors which contribute to the success of children's immersion language learning
- the language exposure potential of certain activities
- the language programme and how it is organized
- the contents of a current language plan
- the role of families in an immersion setting

How the unit is organized

This unit is organized into five sections. These are:

1. participating in maximising exposure to the immersion language
2. supporting the development of children's ability to understand the immersion language
3. supporting the emergence of children's ability to speak the immersion language
4. participating in the implementation of planned language activities
5. maintaining the interest, motivation and emotional well being of children

Unit 1

Section 1

Participating in maximising exposure to the immersion language

The development of language skills – any language – depends on the quality of the language environment which surrounds the learner. A significant factor in language learning is the amount of exposure to the new language experienced by the learner. An immersion setting cannot replicate the conditions under which children learn a home language. This section looks at ways of ensuring the strongest possible language immersion environment for children in your setting and your role in contributing to it.

Using the immersion language at all times

Main points

It is important to speak the immersion language with children throughout all activities.

Children learn language by hearing it spoken. In particular children learn language when the language they hear is spoken directly to them. It is important that you speak the immersion language to children from the first day of their arrival in the setting.



Hearing a language spoken which is not the language of the home does not upset children. Children who are coming to a care or education setting for the first time experience many things which are new to them or are different from their home experiences:

- new children and adults
- a new physical environment
- different activities and routines

The 'strange' way of talking is another difference that children take on board as part of the overall experience. In the early

days in particular, they are so involved in their play experiences and in the development of new relationships, that they frequently do not pay much attention to staff and do not in fact notice that staff are not speaking in their home language.

Providing that children's experiences are happy, providing that they are allowed to develop in an environment which is caring, reassuring and supportive, providing that they are allowed to respond using their home language, children will not suffer any kind of trauma, emotional or psychological, because staff speak to them in a language which is not that of the home.

There are a number of occasions when the home language must be used:

- to extricate a child from a dangerous situation
- to make a child aware of a potentially dangerous situation

There are a number of occasions when it may be advisable to stop using the immersion language and begin to use the home language:

- to get clear information from a child about an injury sustained
- to console a child who is distressed

ACTIVITY



Describe two situations where you feel certain that you would decide not to use the immersion language with children, Give your reasons.



Describe two situations where you feel you might decide to change from the immersion language to the home language in talking to children, Give your reasons.



If you have made a decision in the past to use the home language with children, write a short account of the circumstances.

Using the immersion language with colleagues

Main points

It is important to speak the immersion language with your colleagues throughout the course of your work with children.

There will be many times during the course of your work with children when you will have reasons and opportunities to speak to your colleagues. Much of this communication will relate to the organization of the children, their activities and routines. Some of it will involve informal conversation.

As has been said already, children learn language by hearing it spoken, in particular, when the language they hear is spoken directly to them. Despite the fact that much of your communication with colleagues may go unheard by children or may be on the edge of their consciousness, it is important that you continue speaking the immersion language at all times with your colleagues.



Exposure to language even at an unconscious level has learning benefits. Children can continue to develop and consolidate their familiarity with the new sounds and rhythms of the immersion language. They may hear words and phrases repeated which they have already heard. They will be encountering two-way communication in the immersion language which will act as a useful model in supporting their own eventual use of the language, when appropriate.

Critically, the children will be given a consistent message about the importance of the language within the setting. This is also an important factor in encouraging children to use the language themselves.

ACTIVITY



Describe what happened when you had to speak to a colleague during the course of your work within the setting. Describe briefly what you spoke about. Write down if possible the exact sentences which were used. Identify if children were within earshot. Indicate where a child joined in or made a relevant comment.

Increasing the frequency of immersion language use, and its quantity

Main points

It is important to ensure a high level of verbal interaction with children in the immersion language and to seek out opportunities which encourage verbal interaction with them.

During the course of your work you will find yourself involved in a wide variety of interactions with children. These interactions give rise to a variety of language opportunities. Some of these language opportunities are brief by nature:

- instructions
- encouraging comments
- admonishments

Some of them may involve an extended conversation or discussion:

- talking about a story
- comforting a distressed child
- resolving a conflict

The more frequently a situation occurs in which children hear the immersion language directed at them and the more language children hear in these situations the more useful the

learning environment becomes.

You have an important role to play in:

- remaining on the alert to opportunities to interact with children and use the language with them
- using fully any language opportunities which arise and building on them
- directing a confident, extended flow of language to the children throughout the interaction

It is important to remember that the language dynamic in an immersion language setting is different from the dynamic within a home language setting. Each dynamic reflects a differing level of language development, and the correspondingly differing needs of the children.

Children's home language skills

The home language of most children arriving in an early years setting, while still immature, is relatively well developed. Their ability to understand what is being said by others is usually well advanced. They are already using the language themselves, with relative clarity and accuracy, or are capable of doing so.

The task of staff in a home language setting is to provide opportunities to:

- consolidate, extend and refine a language which is already developed to a significant degree
- encourage children's social use of the language
- develop children's self-confidence in using language
- encourage children to formulate and express their needs, feelings, experiences and thoughts in increasingly complex situations



It is mainly through their interactions with their peers that children find opportunities to consolidate existing home language competence. Interactions with staff, on the other hand, provide opportunities to stretch the level of home language competence. They constitute a shared dialogue where the adult facilitates the children in honing their language skills and in developing their skills of self-expression.

Children's immersion language needs

In an immersion language setting, by the very nature of the setting, the balance in language use between staff and children is different. In such a setting, by necessity, the adult's use of language predominates to a significantly higher degree than in a home language setting. Staff interactions with children are more frequent, more obvious, more deliberately sought out, more interventionist. In an immersion language situation, the adult contributes significantly more as a speaker than a listener. The children's main role is as listeners rather than speakers.

These differences are most obvious when children are still in the early stages of learning the immersion language. The differences become less obvious as children's grasp of the immersion language increases and interactions take on more of the characteristics of the shared dialogue of the home language setting. However even when immersion language skills are at a reasonably confident and competent level, aspects of the dynamic of an earlier learning era may be re-introduced when children begin to tackle new or complex language areas.

ACTIVITY



Make a recording of yourself as you interact with a child or a group of children during an activity. Listen to the tape and tick the number of times you do the following:

- *make comments and observations*
- *make suggestions*
- *ask questions and answer them yourself*
- *answer a child's question*
- *describe*
- *discuss*
- *maintain an on-going commentary on what is happening, what children, others or you yourself are doing*
- *praise, encourage, admonish*
- *restate in the immersion language a response or comment*

made by a child in the home language

- *expand in the immersion language a response or comment made by a child in the home language*

Listening to children's responses

Main points

Early immersion language learning depends on strong vigorous input in the immersion language from staff. Children's responses in the home language are to be valued as a normal part of the process.

In the early stages of immersion language learning there are usually two languages in regular use in the immersion setting – the immersion language and the home language.

Staff use the immersion language with one another, and with children in all circumstances, from the first day of children's admission, apart from the few exceptions already described. Children use the home language, initially at all times with staff and children both. Their ability to communicate with staff or other children in the immersion language emerges gradually.



A strong, steady stream of immersion language from staff to children, throughout all activities, and all interactions, is an essential ingredient in bringing about this progression in language learning. However the children's contribution in whatever language or mixture of languages must be valued. The adult role in the early stages of immersion language learning must still provide genuine opportunities for children to respond:

- to give answers
- to make comments
- to ask questions
- to make observations

- to express opinions
- to share thoughts
- to make suggestions
- to maintain a commentary

in whatever language or language mixture they chose.

The children's contribution will help you judge:

- their listening and concentration skills
- their interest and engagement in the experience
- the value of the cognitive, intellectual, sensory, emotional, content of the experience
- how well they understand what you are saying

ACTIVITY



Refer back to the recording of an activity in which you participated with a small group of children. Give a description of the activity, including the number of children involved, how long the activity lasted and your own role. (Note the interest and engagement levels of the children. Indicate children's verbal contributions during the course of the activity.)

	child 1	child 2	child 3	child 4
ask question				
give answer				
make comment				
express opinion				
share thought				
make suggestion				
maintain commentary				

Note any child who made little or no spoken contribution and indicate why you believe this to be the case.

Use the following abbreviations to indicate main language used:

il – immersion language

hl – home language

Giving children personal space

Main points

It is important to recognise and respond to children's need to play or relate to other children independent of adult intervention or influence.

The adult role in the play and learning activities of children in a language immersion setting is a critical one – not only in terms of the amount of time they spend in active involvement with children but in terms of the frequency and degree of their verbal involvement. This dual interaction is at a much higher level than is the case in a home language setting and is the crucial ingredient in an effective language immersion environment. However a constant, unremitting adult presence and commentary may become overwhelming or undermine the value of some experiences.

It is important to recognise that children at times need to engage with their experiences on their own terms, processing what they hear, see, feel, and sense quietly within the confines of their own minds. Sometimes the nature of the activity – painting, for example, or imaginative role play promotes a more private response.



It is important to recognise that children need to be able to establish a position and identity for themselves with other children within the social network of the setting:

- initiating approaches to other children
- reacting to the approaches and the actions of other children
- initiating and responding to discussion and collaboration
- forming opinions about other children
- participating in role play

Staff must ensure that opportunities exist which allow this to happen.

ACTIVITY



Write a short description of an occasion where a child indicated that your presence at an activity was unwelcome. Give some information about the activity and who was participating. Explain how you came to be involved in the activity and what you were doing and saying, and how long you had been there. Explain what the child said or did to indicate that your presence was no longer welcome and give your opinion as to why the child reacted to you in this fashion. Describe how you responded.

Staged dialogue between staff

Main points

It is important that staff collaborate to provide useful opportunities to create or extend immersion language use with children.

During the course of your work with children there are frequent opportunities for you and your colleagues to communicate with one another. Some of this communication involves the normal social interaction which is part of any team situation. Much of it however will be directed at ensuring the smooth progression of the day:

- organising and caring for children
- organising activities
- moving from one phase of the day to another
- exchanging information
- dealing with problems and issues which arise.

These verbal exchanges between staff constitute a valuable and important backdrop to the immersion language environment in practical and psychological terms.

Practical benefits

Children hear sounds, words and phrases which they are also hearing in other contexts. They hear new sounds, words and phrases. Their experience of two-way communication in the immersion language provides a useful model when they begin to speak the language themselves.

Psychological benefits

Children's awareness that the immersion language is being used between staff gives them a clear message about the rightness, importance and status of the immersion language in the setting. Their perceptions about the value of the language have an important influence on their own use of the language in the future.

Additional benefits

These benefits can be significantly added to if staff involve themselves in a staged dialogue. A staged dialogue involves staff deliberately initiating a dialogue with one another for the specific purpose of:

- attracting children's attention to the dialogue
- involving children in the dialogue
- consciously providing increased exposure to a language item or area



A staged dialogue might arise as part of an activity where planned staff collaboration is already taking place – in a story-telling session or a game. It might arise when a member of staff who is working with children alone creates an opportunity to draw another member of staff into conversation. It might arise during a daily routine.

Staged dialogue is characterised by increased use of colleagues' names, heightened intonation and facial expression, increased volume, along with more deliberate physical gestures.

ACTIVITY



You are welcoming children to the setting in the morning. A colleague is close at hand but doing something else. A child arrives wearing a new coat and hat. What would you say to the child? How can you draw your colleague into the conversation? What would you say?



A child is playing in the house corner and offers you a 'bun'. What would you say to the child? How would you draw a colleague into the conversation? What would you say?

Using the immersion language with families

Main points

It is important to be familiar with policies and procedures relating to the use of the immersion language with children's families in the setting.

Families have an important role to play in supporting the development of children's immersion language skills. Families can support the development of children's immersion language skills by using the immersion language with them.

The degree to which families use the immersion language may vary depending on a number of factors:

- the family's perception of the importance of their role
- the level of immersion language competence of family members
- the willingness of family members to use their immersion language skills.

The policies and procedures adopted by the setting in relation to using the immersion language with families in the setting should:

- promote family awareness of the importance of its role in supporting the immersion language learning of children,
- encourage families to use whatever immersion language skills they have,
- promote and facilitate a basic minimum of immersion language use.

The policies and procedures adopted by the setting in relation to using the immersion language with families should provide a bridge between home and setting. They should promote in children's consciousness, a consistent message about the importance of the immersion language within the setting and the life of the family both.

NOTE

The policies and procedures adopted by the setting in relation to using the immersion language with family should not:

- **undermine the sense of family dignity**
 - **obstruct the exchange of important information about children.**
-

NOTE

Remember that the immersion language may already have had a role in the life of a child prior to entry to the language immersion setting and that families might expect staff to interact with them in the immersion language as a matter of course.

ACTIVITY



Write a summary of the setting's policies and procedures in relation to immersion language use with families. Indicate whether you feel that it promotes family awareness of the importance of its role and encourages families to use their language immersion skills. Describe the basic minimum level of immersion language that families are encouraged to use with staff and children inside and outside the setting



Make a list of the children in your setting and indicate the immersion language competence of family members.

In this section you have looked at ways of contributing to your participation in maximising exposure to the immersion language. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- speaking the immersion language at all times
- ensuring that you use the immersion language frequently with children
- ensuring that you extend as far as possible the amount of immersion language you use on any one occasion
- actively seeking and creating opportunities to involve children in immersion language exchanges
- collaborating with staff in providing intentional opportunities for dialogue
- participating in intentional dialogue with colleagues
- listening to children and valuing their responses
- respecting children's need or wish to function at times without adult intervention or involvement
- recognising how families' use of the immersion language benefits children's learning.

Unit 1

Section 2

Supporting the development of children's ability to understand the immersion language



Learning language – any language, a first language, a home language or an additional language – involves two main stages. These are called the receptive and the productive stages. The receptive stage refers to that period when learners hear language but do not use it. They listen to the new language, become familiar with the sounds, rhythms and words of the language and develop understanding. The productive stage refers to that period when learners use or begin to use the new language.

The receptive and productive stages of language learning are not totally separate. There can be overlap. It is possible to function productively at a simple level of language and function receptively at more complex levels. The more competent the language user, the less of a gap there is between receptive and productive language use. However even amongst fluent speakers of a language, receptive competence tends to be higher than productive competence.

The previous section described the importance of developing and maintaining an environment in which children are surrounded by and enveloped in the immersion language. To listen to language which you cannot understand is to listen to noise. This section focuses on facilitating children's ability to understand the immersion language and build their comprehension skills layer by layer.

Clear natural use of the immersion language, appropriate to the activities

Main points

It is important to speak the immersion language clearly and naturally and in a way that is appropriate to the nature of the activities which are taking place.

Clarity of speech

Clarity of speech has two meanings. The first meaning refers to enunciation; the clear distinct formation of sounds and words as they emerge from the speaker's mouth. The second refers to clarity of expression; the speaker knows what he or she wants to say and expresses it in a confident, straightforward, uncomplicated manner. To be effective in an immersion setting you need to have or need to develop clarity of speech on both levels.

Clear sound and word formation

Language is made up of sounds. Mumbled indistinct speech will prevent children from hearing the sounds of the language and their combination into words. It will cause difficulties for them in pronouncing words correctly in the future, particularly regarding those sounds which are peculiar to the immersion language.

Clarity of expression

Clarity of expression in the speaker is a basic rule in ensuring comprehension in the listener. There are particular challenges around comprehension in an immersion setting which we will be talking about in more detail shortly. However, aside from these specific additional challenges, comprehension in any language setting depends first and foremost on clarity of expression, the ability to express oneself confidently in straightforward, uncomplicated language.

Using language naturally in a way which is appropriate to the nature of the activity

The way in which adults use their home language with children gives important information as to how we might use an immersion language with them. They use it in a way which reflects:

- the maturity levels of children
- their conceptual development
- their skills of social interaction
- their needs, wants and interests
- their existing language competence

The language used with young children is simple. Short sentences predominate and there is a restricted vocabulary range. Language becomes increasingly complex as children mature and their language ability becomes more sophisticated. Anyone who is used to talking to children will be aware that their use of language with children tends to demonstrate an almost instinctive response to the maturity levels of the children and their language ability.

The immersion language that is used with children reflects the same progression:

- **simple** vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammatical structures;
- **evolving into more complex** vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammatical structures.

The type of language that is used in an immersion setting in the early stages of language learning is dominated by:

- simple sentences involving one idea at a time
- increased use of naming words
- increased use of the present tense
- increased use of 'is' and 'are'
- increased use of the order form.

NOTE

There are many different types of sentences. These are the main categories.



Simple	It's a nice day.
Compound simple sentences joined by 'and'	It's a nice day and I'm going out for a walk.
Complex simple sentences joined by 'but', 'so', 'if', 'although', 'because', 'that'	I'm getting thirsty because the sun is so hot.
Elaborate extended complex sentences	I'm going to get a drink because I'm getting so thirsty that I'll faint if I don't.

ACTIVITY



Use the format below to think about how often you use each type of sentence in your setting and with whom. Do not worry about trying to remember the names of the sentence types.

	very frequently	frequently	quite frequently	sometimes	rarely	never
simple						
compound						
complex						
elaborate						



Give examples of immersion language sentences you have used in the past with children.



Give examples of immersion language sentences you have used in the past with staff.

Providing non-verbal clues to help children understand the language they hear

Main points

When you speak to children in the immersion language, it is important that you provide them with visual, auditory and contextual clues to help them understand what you are saying.

Comprehension in the early stages of language learning is good guessing. On the other hand, competent users of language are able to understand what they hear on the basis of their specific understanding of the words that they hear. Competent users of language nearly always understand **all** the words they hear in **most** situations.



Competent users of language need to guess at meaning only rarely. As adults we all recognise the situation where in conversation somebody uses a word or phrase which we have never heard before or whose precise meaning we are not entirely sure of. The fact that we do not understand this specific word or phrase does not prevent us following or understanding the conversation. On the basis of the language we know and our knowledge of the subject under discussion we can usually make a good guess at the meaning of the word or phrase which we do not know.

At a more basic level it is also quite possible to grasp the gist of something without understanding **any** of the individual words or phrases. For example, a cup lies broken on the floor. Someone comes in, sees it, starts to shout and gesticulate, pointing accusingly at some other person. That other person, will have very little doubt as to what is being said, even if a language is being used which s/he has never heard before. Understanding in this case is based on grasping the gist of something, where the person makes a guess at meaning based on the non-language or non-verbal clues.

In the case of the broken cup, a range of non-verbal clues are provided

contextual clues	⇒	the broken cup	Getting the gist or guessing in this context is straightforward:
auditory clues	⇒	a raised angry voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the scenario is uncomplicated the broken cup sets the scene
visual clues	⇒	a cross face an accusatory expression a pointing finger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> anger and annoyance are easy to discern an accusatory expression and pointing finger are easy to interpret

The learner depends substantially on guessing in the early stages of immersion language learning. As competence increases, guessing has less and less of a role. The accomplished language user resorts to it infrequently, if at all.

When speaking the immersion language to children, you can facilitate their ability to understand what you are saying,

support their ability to guess well, if speech is accompanied by non-verbal clues. There are two types of non-verbal clues:

- clues which relate to the context or situation about which you are speaking; these are called contextual or situational clues – where children can see, feel, hear or smell the event, person, activity or thing which is under discussion
- clues where communication techniques of voice or body suggest or convey meaning

In using the immersion language you must ensure that you:

- implement the 'here and now' principle – use language in concrete situations or practical activities which are happening in the immediate vicinity or in which the children are actively participating
- use your voice and body language to suggest or convey meaning

It is important to remember that children's ability to understand what they hear depends to a large extent on the following factors:

- their cognitive levels – how well their mental abilities and experiences to date support their ability to assimilate and process present experiences
- their listening abilities – how well children are focusing and maintaining concentration on what is being said

For example, if there is too big a gap between the cognitive levels of the child, and the focus of the language, non-verbal clues will be insufficient to close the gap in understanding. The gap in this case is not a language gap, but a cognitive gap. If children have poor listening skills and skills of concentration, body language and dramatic use of voice need to increase not only for the purpose of supporting meaning, but as a deliberate strategy to attract and maintain focus.

ACTIVITY



Use the following table to indicate life non-verbal clues you might employ to help children understand the meaning of the following individual words. Where you can, refer to specific resources in your setting. Indicate any words with which you have difficulty.

	physical item	physical action	physical gesture	facial expression	tone of voice
madadh dog					
gasúr boy					
cailín girl					
teach house					
dearthair brother					
crann tree					
úll apple					
buí yellow					
gorm blue					
mór big					
beag small					
ciúin quiet					
go gasta quickly					
ag caoineadh crying					
sásta happy					
deas nice					

Ensuring progress in children's understanding

Main points

It is important to ensure progress in the build-up of children's understanding – both in general terms and in terms of specific or key language comprehension.

Successful comprehension or understanding of the immersion

language does not necessarily require the ability to understand every single word in any sentence or utterance. Comprehension can be generalised, with non-verbal clues having an important role to play in filling the gap between language received by the listener and the listener's understanding.

However, if language comprehension is to advance to any significant degree and if learners are to become able to understand meaning in more complex situations (and if they are ultimately to be able to speak the language) they must be able to understand specific language items – vocabulary and phrases – develop a familiarity with them and be able to remember them. As children's understanding of specific language increases, that language then offers further clues, and combines with non-verbal clues, to help children grasp the meaning of ever more complex language or language situations.

Balance of non-verbal comprehension and specific language comprehension

Children's comprehension of the immersion language rests on a combination of:

- generalized understanding arising from non-verbal clues and
- clear understanding of specific language items.

The balance changes as children's competence increases, with less and less reliance on non-verbal clues as time goes on, and a generalised understanding giving way to a more and more precise understanding of the language they hear. However new or unfamiliar experiences, new or unfamiliar language items, even group size, can change the balance of generalised and specific language comprehension and bring about an adjustment in the degree or type of non-verbal clues required.

Generalised understanding of language

To build successfully on children's generalised understanding of the immersion language, a number of factors must be taken into account. You need to:

- consider the cognitive and experiential levels of children

- consider listening and concentration skills
- introduce new or unfamiliar language in a practical hands-on context
- ensure the practical hands-on context is not too far beyond the cognitive and experiential levels to date
- be mindful of group size

Understanding of specific language

The same factors must also be taken into consideration when building up children's understanding of specific language items. Underpinning the successful build-up of children's understanding of specific language items is a language programme where:

- key language items are identified
- key language areas are planned for systematically
- activities are planned to allow natural, relevant use of this language
- context, facial expression, tone of voice and body language are used to ensure clear understanding of these items
- specific items of language are used frequently to help children remember them

Building effectively on children's understanding of specific language requires you to:

- be familiar with the overall content of the language programme
- be familiar with the order in which different language areas are addressed
- provide non-verbal clues when you use language
- use language frequently, independently and in collaboration with colleagues
- keep in review any key items of language children have acquired
- take advantage of opportunities to revisit and use language which has been the subject of focus in the past, whether the language is already well established or more recent
- provide a balance between language which is just at the level of children's competence and language which stretches their competence



ACTIVITY



Describe an activity in which you participated with children recently. Were you:

- *using language generally without any particular focus on specific words or phrases or sentence patterns?*
- *paying particular attention to new or unfamiliar items of language and using them frequently?*
- *finding opportunities to use language items which had been part of the planning focus in the past?*

Did children show their understanding of what you were saying in their actions or in their speech? Were you conscious of any child who was failing to understand what you were saying?

Collaborating with colleagues to make meaning clear

Main points

It is important that you collaborate with colleagues to demonstrate, through action, what is meant by what is said.

Providing non-verbal clues, or using a combination of non-verbal clues and specific language which you know children understand, helps children understand what is being said. This process, however, can be accelerated through a strategy which involves an action being carried out by:

- yourself, at a colleague's request or instruction
- a colleague at your request or instruction

This strategy is an effective way of drawing attention to a new or less familiar specific language item and ensuring immediate, unambiguous comprehension. Carrying out a specific action in response to an instruction or request is one way of supplying contextual, visual or auditory clues which reflect precisely or

are tailored precisely to the specific language in question. It usually works best in relation to a focus on single word items and in relation to a single action rather than a series of actions.

a verb	siúil	walk
an adverb	siúil go ciúin	walk, <u>quietly</u>
a naming word	chuig an <u>tábla</u>	to the <u>table</u>
a describing word	chuig an <u>tábla dearg</u>	to the <u>red</u> table

It is usually accompanied by a descriptive comment on the action taking place.

Amharc. Tá Máire ag siúil. Tá Máire ag siúil chuig an tábla. Tá Máire ag siúil go ciúin chuig an tábla dearg. Look. Máire is walking. Máire is walking to the table. Máire is walking quietly to the red table.

It is usually followed by the same request or instruction to the learner, again followed by a descriptive comment on the action taking place.

This type of collaboration usually arises as part of an activity where staff collaboration is already an important ingredient in the activity – game, physical play or story, or it may arise when a member of staff who is working alone with children recognises that additional input from another member of staff at that point may be particularly useful in supporting comprehension.



Exchanges of this nature are usually characterised by increased use of colleagues' names, heightened intonation and facial expression, more deliberate physical gestures, and heightened emphasis on key language items in the exchange.

ACTIVITY



Give some examples from your experience, where you carried out a deliberate action or where you asked a colleague to carry out a deliberate action, in order to ensure that children understood what was being said. Describe the circumstances in which this happened, the activity, what you or your colleague was doing, the number of children. Indicate whether the action involved reminding children of language which had been part of their planned language experience to date, of which they still appeared unsure or had forgotten, or whether it involved a language item within the current plan, or whether it involved a language item which arose spontaneously during the course of an activity.

Monitoring children's comprehension

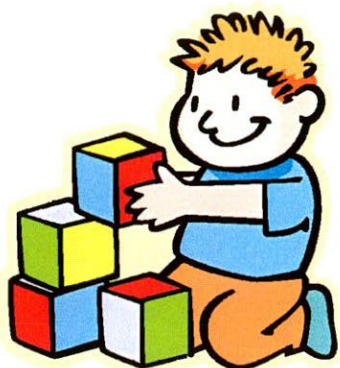
Main points

It is important to monitor how well children are understanding what you say as you say it and respond accordingly.

When you are talking to children you need to remain on the alert with regard to how well they appear to be understanding what you are saying. Children may indicate that they are having difficulties in understanding through:

- an inappropriate action
- an inappropriate verbal response in home or immersion language
- a lack of response
- loss of focus or concentration

If you become aware during the course of a verbal interaction with children that there are gaps in their understanding, you need to take compensatory measures. You can do this by adjusting your language or adjusting your non-verbal clues.



In an early years immersion setting, speech is already characterised by simple sentence patterns and increased use of naming words, the present tense, the verb 'to be' and the order form of verbs. However even within these parameters language levels can vary in complexity. Without noticing, you may have gone up a register. Perhaps you are speaking too quickly. Perhaps the context in which an interaction is taking place is less concrete or less practical than it might be. Perhaps you have put less effort into facial expression and body language than usual. Perhaps you have misjudged the range of supporting clues needed. Perhaps the range of language competence in the group is too broad, and you are pitching your language usage and non-verbal clues at a level which is inappropriate for those with lower levels of comprehension.

In order to address the situation you need to identify the reasons which may be giving rise to poor or inadequate comprehension and introduce appropriate modifications. These might include:

- further language simplification, in particular avoidance of pronouns (him, her, it, she, he, them, they)
- slowing down your rate of speech
- increasing the level and range of contextual, visual and auditory clues

You also need to remember that the behaviour associated with poor or inadequate understanding could also be indicative of underdeveloped listening skills, inattentiveness on the part of the learner, or immature cognitive and experiential levels.

ACTIVITY



Give two examples from your experience when you felt that children were having difficulty in understanding what you were saying. If possible, include a group situation and a situation involving an individual child. Describe what happened, how you adjusted your language usage, or non-verbal clues, or any other action you took in order to support the children's ability to understand.

NOTE

It has been suggested by research that the positive benefits to general learning which are frequently associated with immersion language education may arise from the:

- **heightened levels of concentration**
- **enhanced listening skills**
- **additional intellectual activity involved in processing non-verbal clues**

all of which are needed in order to understand, remember and use a new language.

In this section you have looked at ways in which you can contribute to the development of children's ability to understand the immersion language. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- enunciating the immersion language clearly and distinctly
- expressing yourself in straightforward, uncomplicated language
- practising a simplified language register
- placing your use of language in concrete, practical contexts and situations
- using body language and facial expression
- varying the intonation, tone and quality of your voice
- modelling actions
- building up children's specific understanding of key language items systematically

When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you are aware of:

- the receptive and productive stages of language learning and how they relate to one another
- children's cognitive levels and learning characteristics
- the importance of a language programme in supporting effective immersion language learning

Unit 1

Section 3

Supporting the emergence of children's ability to speak the immersion language

Children's ability to speak language – any language – emerges gradually. Comparisons in the progression of the emergence of speech between the home language and the immersion language can be made but there are also differences to be noted. Through a comparison with key features of home language development, this section identifies ways of facilitating the emergence of speech in the immersion language and providing a solid base for the establishment of complex speech usage.

Main points

Patterns of home language development

There is an expected pattern in children's progression in learning to speak their home language.

During the first months of their lives, babies develop a vast range of skills including vocalization and sound control skills. Furthermore, during this period, the important association of sound with meaning begins to develop as babies discover that the differing sounds they make produce differing reactions and responses from those around them.

In and around their first birthday most children use their first 'words' – sounds they use consistently in response to particular objects or situations. By 18 months, most children are using single words with gesture, action and tone of voice, to convey a range of meaning. By two years they are using two word utterances.



During their third year most children, while sometimes demonstrating inaccuracies of pronunciation or grammar, are able to use a wide range of basic structures in their home language for a variety of purposes and situations. In formulating or putting together these sentences or utterances children may be producing sentences or utterances which they have never heard before.

In home language development children move from making sounds to developing a consciousness of meaning, to repeating language which they have heard before to convey meaning, to using language creatively to convey more complex meaning.

Comparisons to patterns of speech production in an immersion language

Main points

There are clear patterns of progression in children's ability to speak an immersion language.

The emergence of speech in an immersion language setting reflects some similarities to the progression in the home language. The initial two stages are not repeated. Vocalization skills and sound control skills have already been developed. The association of meaning with language is well established. Children in an early years immersion setting begin speech production at the third stage – single word utterances.

As children in an early years language immersion setting hear the language spoken, as they are exposed to it in situations where they have the visual, auditory and contextual clues which help them understand it, as their familiarity grows and they start to remember some of the language they hear and understand, they begin to



substitute immersion language items for home language items. They generally demonstrate the following progression:

- interspersal of single words here and there in home language usage
- use of fixed phrases associated with daily or regular routines
- increased use of single words and phrases in what is still largely home language usage
- use of short simple sentences
- increased use of simple sentences
- introduction of longer or more complex sentences

Reflecting the progression in home language speech, single word and fixed phrases spoken in the immersion language are words and phrases which have been already heard previously. However by the time basic forms of adult speech in the immersion language have been established, children are using language creatively, producing sentences and utterances which they may never have heard previously.

ACTIVITY



Keep a diary of instances of children's immersion language use. Identify children by name. Indicate what they said, the date, circumstances and who was present. Share this with your colleagues.

NOTE

Young children retain the ability to make sounds which are particular to a new language in a way that adults do not.

Naturally occurring repetition in the language register

Main points

The restricted language register which characterizes language used with young children lends itself to frequent repetition.

Many of the strategies which promote the development of children's ability to understand the immersion language also facilitate their ability to speak it.

In order to understand language, children must be exposed to it in situations where they have visual, auditory and contextual clues to help them understand it. In order to produce language they need to remember it. In order to remember it they need to hear it frequently.

The importance to immersion language learning of creating and maintaining an environment in which children are exposed to a high level of verbal interaction from staff has already been described. The need for staff to use language with children which reflects and supports the children's maturity and developmental levels, their needs, wants, interests, and motivation has also been described.

While children are exposed to a variety of language in the early immersion setting, inevitably, the language used with young children in an early years immersion setting is more restricted and narrower in scope than that used with older children or adults.

Where there is an emphasis on sustained language input from staff, where children are surrounded and enveloped by the immersion language, and where the language register is narrow, the frequency of their

exposure to the language within that register will be high. This will result in a naturally high level of repetition within that register and across vocabulary phrases and sentence patterns within the register.

Increasing opportunities for repetition

Main points

Research into home language learning gives useful insights as to how exposure to the immersion language might be further increased in the immersion setting.

The speed with which children learn to speak their first language is remarkable:

- their progress from single word utterances to the establishment of the basic forms of adult speech
- their versatility or creativity in using language utterances which they may never have heard or produced before
- their ability to acquire grammatical structures, without the ability to understand grammatical rules

So impressive is this accomplishment that early speech development is a major area of linguistic or educational research. A number of factors consistently emerge as having particular significance in the production of longer and/or more complex utterances:

- age – older children generally demonstrate more complex patterns of speech
- IQ – children with higher IQs tend to use more complex language than those with lower.



The most interesting factor relates to the language environment of the home, in particular **how** language is used with young children. Children who learn to speak language well are exposed to a language usage which has very particular characteristics. So noticeable are

these characteristics and so consistently are they used that the language used by adults with young children has come to be known as motherese, caretakerese or caregiver talk.

NOTE

The gender specific term motherese is not used in this text. The term caretakerese is used.

Sequential repetition

We have already looked at some of the characteristics of caretakerese:

- a predominance of short simple sentences
- a restricted vocabulary register
- increased facial expression

However further characteristics have also been noted. These include repetition of words, phrases or sentence patterns in close proximity to one another.

A	B
<p>Good boy, good boy. Aren't you a good boy for taking your bottle?</p>	<p>Look! Look at that! Look at that big dog! Do you see the dog? Do you see the big dog? Isn't that a nice big dog? Would you like a nice big dog like that?</p>

Facial expression, pointing, gestures and eye contact draw the child's attention. Variation of tone, emphasis and rate of speech maintain the child's interest and avoid monotony.

Using sequential repetition in the immersion setting

It is important that you practice this type of sequential repetition in your language usage with children in your immersion setting. In this way you not only respond to any opportunity for repetition of key language that occurs throughout activities, but you also substantially increase exposure on each occasion.

Putting this type of repetition to a simple tune is a very effective way of providing a high level of frequency in sequential repetition activities. If you develop a good repertoire of simple catchy tunes, simple songs can be composed quickly, sometimes spontaneously, and can be used throughout many or all of your settings activities.

ACTIVITY



Give examples of some songs or rhymes used in your setting which incorporate sequential repetition. Describe when and how they are used.



Give an example of a song or rhyme you have made up yourself, and which incorporates sequential repetition. Describe why and when you used it for the first time.



In both of the above activities, show how other key words might be substituted to provide scope for frequent use of different language items.

Restatement and expansion

Main points

Restatement and expansion, which are noticeable characteristics of caretakerese, play a valuable role in the immersion language setting.

The terms 'restatement' and 'expansion' are often used interchangeably as there is some overlap in their functions. Restatement means that you say something that has already been said by another person using a slightly different formulation or referring it back as a question. Expansion means that you add to the content of what has already been said by another. Restatement is a way of confirming what you've heard or the meaning of what you've heard. Expansion is a way of elaborating on what you've heard, taking it a step further, building on it.

Adult dialogue		Mother and child dialogue	
Adult 1 ⇒	I was at the cinema last night.	Child ⇒	Ball.
Adult 2 ⇒	Oh! You were at the cinema – to see that Mel Gibson film?	Mother ⇒	You want the ball – the red ball?
		Child ⇒	Aaa.
		Mother ⇒	You want the ball? You want the red ball? You want the red ball? Here you are. Good boy.

Let's look more closely at the mother child exchange. In the above case, to understand what the child means by the single word utterance 'ball', the mother interprets the child's tone of voice, facial expression and states what she believes his meaning to be. She probably accompanies her statement with gesture, pointing to or lifting the ball. Having confirmed from the child's response that her understanding is correct she expands – 'the red ball'. However in this case she is not

offering a choice, she is giving more information about the ball in question. She repeats the restatement and expansion as she gives the child the ball and finishes with a further piece of information- 'good boy'.



In effect, what the mother has been doing is saying words that the child has left out, words that the child has been unable to say. She has offered back to the child the complete language version of what she thinks the child intended, providing him with a specially tailored model of the necessary sentence.

In the immersion situation children are doing approximately the same thing – they are omitting language which they do not yet have the skills to use.

Using restatement and expansion in the immersion setting

Expansion and restatement in an immersion situation carry out the same essential role that they do in the home language situation. They provide children with specially tailored models of important sentences, offering back to children, in the immersion language, what they intended to say, or said in the home language.

Research into home language learning has indicated that restatement and expansion techniques have a significant role in the levels of home language acquisition achieved by young children. Make sure that you consciously use restatement and expansion techniques in verbal activities with children, increasing substantially the frequency with which they are hearing identified key words, phrases and sentence patterns.

ACTIVITY



Demonstrate restatement and expansion techniques in relation to the following statements made by children. The children's statements are in their home language and your restatement and expansion responses are in the immersion language.

- *I want to play with the bus*
- *Can I put my car on the shelf*

- *I don't want to drink this milk.*
- *Where's my doll?*
- *I hurt my foot yesterday.*

Don't forget to incorporate a bit of sequential repetition if possible.

Progression through the language programme

Main points

It is important to build gradually on the language programme, ensuring that repetition, restatement and expansion take account of both the current focus of the language programme and the language programme to date.

Language is made up of words put together in sentences. How sentences are formed depends on the grammar of the language. There are thousands upon thousands of words in a language. However there is a limited range in the types of sentences that can be made.

Sentence patterns and grammatical rules

The core sentence patterns that children hear in an early years immersion setting are simple, involving one idea at a time. These simple sentence patterns and the grammatical rules which underpin them are the foundations on which more complex language is built. In an immersion setting there is a high level of exposure to a range of simple sentences and simple grammatical rules. The basic structures are repeated again and again throughout the course of the day.

Fixed phrases

Fixed phrases can be described as units of words which do not change. They are often phrases which are common to a range of differing contexts or are used in the same context on a regular basis -

good boy

be careful

there's a good girl
good morning

hurry up
mind yourself



Fixed phrases occur regularly in social or organizational situations. The frequency of these situations ensures that there are many opportunities for regular repetition of this sort of language. The regular repetition creates a strong possibility that children will remember fixed phrases of this kind easily and will incorporate them naturally into their home language usage:

- when they participate in the routines and activities where these phrases occur
- when they role-play in social play activities

Make sure you use a range of common fixed phrases in your contact with families. The fact that each phrase is a complete intelligible utterance, used in a specific situation or applicable in a number of situations, means that even families who have little or no immersion language skills can support their children's language learning in a practical way from the very beginning. It may give them sufficient confidence to seek to extend their range of fixed phrases.

ACTIVITY



Think of the fixed phrases you use with children during the course of your work. List them. Indicate when you are most likely to use them. Indicate the fixed phrases that you use most frequently.

Vocabulary

The restricted scope of the sentence patterns and the grammatical structures which feature most predominately in an early years language immersion setting, along with the limited number of fixed phrases occurring regularly in social and organizational situations, ensure a natural, nearly automatic level of repetition in these language areas.

The vocabulary range of most modern languages contains many thousands of words. A vocabulary relevant to the learning needs of children in an early years language immersion setting has a much narrower focus. However, even

this restricted vocabulary will involve hundreds of words. Your setting's language programme should ensure systematic exposure to immersion language vocabulary areas, through a cycle of planned units of language around identified themes or topics.

You have a role in ensuring that the high level of verbal interaction you maintain with children throughout the implementation of a particular unit of the language programme demonstrates comprehensive use of the strategies of repetition, restatement and expansion. You must ensure repeated focus on the key vocabulary within an ongoing language unit, or on a specific phrase or sentence pattern which has been identified as requiring a planned focus.

Planned activities will provide opportunities to use key language naturally, relevantly, and frequently throughout the course of the session. Use these opportunities to their maximum, ensuring sequential repetition. Planned activities will provide opportunities for children to comment, make observations and participate in discussion. They will do this using the home language or a combination of home language and immersion language. Respond to them by restating what they have said, giving them complete immersion language versions of what they have said and/or expanding further in the immersion language, remodelling for them key vocabulary and tailored sentence patterns.

The strategies of repetition, restatement and expansion should permeate your verbal interactions with the children, reiterating the key language focus of the current plan and revisiting layers of past language experience. To practice the new, consolidate the recent, maintain the established, and build competence systematically layer by layer, requires you to be familiar with:

- the overall content of the language programme
 - the focus of the current language plan
- and
- to keep within recall key language items of past planning.

NOTE

Vocabulary is classified according to its function. Here are some of the most common vocabulary types.

Nouns (naming words)	fear man	bean woman	madadh dog	cat cat
Adjectives (describing words)	dearg red	gorm blue	mór big	beag small
Verbs (action words)	rith run	léim jump	ceol sing	tóg lift
Adverbs (describing words)	go gasta quickly	go ciúin quietly	go mall slowly	
Pronouns (stand in place of nouns)	é he	mé me	tú you	í she

ACTIVITY

Under each category, list some of the words you use frequently in your setting.



Give details about the focus of language exposure in your current plan – the theme or topic and key vocabulary identified. Give its location in the overall planning cycle in relation to previous themes or topics and future themes or topics.



Describe a planned language activity in which you participated as part of the current plan and how it offered scope for exposure to identified vocabulary within the plan. Describe any opportunities that you created to provide further practice in relation to key vocabulary of past planning or to provide initial familiarity with key vocabulary of future planning.



Describe any other activities taking place which offered scope for exposure to identified vocabulary within the plan.

Encouraging children to verbalise in the immersion language

Main points

It is important to participate in activities which encourage children to verbalise in the immersion language.

Children will verbalize in the immersion language in a number of different ways, such as mimicry, chorused responses, repetition without understanding. The most highly developed way in which children use the immersion language is when they use it in the right context, spontaneously and without prompting. This type of language usage will range from using single words or phrases in the immersion language within a home language utterance, to increasing the substitution of the immersion language for the home language, until the child is using the immersion language frequently and consistently in a variety of activities and contexts.

Children's ability to use the immersion language in this way emerges gradually over an extended period of time. A number of factors influence how soon children begin to use the language spontaneously. Central to these are the quality of the children's learning activities and the quality of their exposure to the immersion language. How quickly the language emerges is also affected by age, ability, personality and the degree of family use of the immersion language.

The quality of the learning environment can be enhanced through a number of strategies designed specifically to facilitate verbalization.

Providing a prompt

Providing a prompt involves creating a context which encourages a brief verbalization from children:

- giving a negative or affirmative reply to a simple question
'An bhfuil tú críochnaithe?'

'Are you finished?'

- choosing from two possible answers

'Cad é atá de dhíth ort? An bocsá beag nó an bocsá mór'.

'Which do you want – the big box or the small box?'

- completing a sentence given by adult

'Cad é atá agam sa mhála – an carr gorm nó an carr dearg. Tá an carr _____ agam'.

'What do I have in the bag – the blue car or the red car?'

I have the _____ car.'

In all of these situations the context is restricted, the clue to the response has been given in the question, the language range needed to respond is limited. Situations of this type occur naturally during the day. You should be on the alert for opportunities which allow scope for this kind of interchange:

- asking questions
- offering choices
- asking questions and leaving room for children to join in with you in completing the answer.



Stories and games

Stories which have a repetitive theme in them are particularly useful for providing an opportunity to complete a sentence or a phrase. In group storytelling sessions the group response is particularly useful in encouraging more reticent children.

Games also lend themselves effectively to this type of prompted immersion language response. An imaginative approach can create, adapt and develop many stimulating games suitable for the immersion language environment. The following constitute some of more common ones:

- games with pictures, dice or picture skittles
- games such as 'what's missing' or 'pass the parcel'
- physical games, games with music, sorting games, games with a feely bag.

When you engage in this type of verbal interaction with children you must ensure that:

- appropriate contextual, visual and auditory clues are in place
- you take into account the language focus of the current plan
- you take opportunities to revisit the language focus of past planning

It is important, when working with children during activities that support prompted language immersion responses, that you do not coerce them to respond in the immersion language, or pressurize them, or penalize them for not responding in the immersion language. The mood should always be reassuring and enjoyable. Prompted immersion language response activities should not be attempted prematurely. Children need to be settled and comfortable in their surroundings and their relationships with adults if this type of activity is to be productive. More importantly, their abilities in understanding the immersion language must be in the process of becoming well established.

ACTIVITY



Describe a story-telling session or game where you provided an opportunity for:

- *a reply in the affirmative or negative*
- *a choice of two possible answers*
- *the completion of a sentence*

NOTE

It has been suggested that a receptive vocabulary of about 500 words should be in place before extensive immersion language production is actively and deliberately encouraged.

Group verbalization

We have already described extended verbalization in the immersion language as a late stage in children's spontaneous creative use of the immersion language. However,

opportunities exist for extended verbalization at an earlier stage of children's language immersion development through songs, rhymes and stories with a chorus.

These opportunities are usually group opportunities, so shy or quiet children are encouraged to participate. Children do not need to understand all that they are saying in these activities. However it is important that they have the general gist of the meaning, or clear understanding of some of the key language, or that non-language clues are in place to help them develop understanding of new or unfamiliar language items.

Using simple tunes to facilitate sequential repetition of sentence patterns or key words around activities in the setting has previously been mentioned. The simplicity of the tunes, the regularity of the language used, the narrow range of language, participation in physical actions, means that children can easily join in, with every possibility that they understand nearly everything that they are saying.

Make sure that you engage with children in these activities. They get children into the habit of using the immersion language.

Using puppets

The regular use of puppets in your setting is a particularly useful way of encouraging verbalization. For example, staff may use puppets to speak to children in a game or drama or storytelling or singing activity. When the puppet is subsequently made available to children, they may verbalize spontaneously in the immersion language. Children who are mimicking a puppet's language behaviour can verbalize for an extended period. What they say may be creative speech. It may be remembered speech. It may also be nonsense. Children may mimic an approximation of puppet speech in much the same way that they mimic writing through scribbling.



ACTIVITY



Observe children as they play with puppets which have been used in a previous planned adult directed activity. Note any attempts they make to imitate the puppets behaviour by using the immersion language. Describe the nature and duration of their language use.

Language production is often regarded as the prime indicator of children's immersion language development. Do not be tempted to force verbalization in the immersion language at the expense of understanding. Insisting on parrot-like repetition of immersion language utterances, with little relevant context or real meaning has little long-term benefits for children. A high level of comprehension skills is of more benefit to children than a reduced level of comprehension along with meaningless production skills of this type

ACTIVITY



Identify a number of children whose immersion language usage in the context of prompted responses you will monitor. Detail their development in relation to:

- *participating in group singing or nursery rhymes*
- *replying in the affirmative or negative to a question*
- *choosing from two possible answers*
- *completing a sentence*
- *joining in a chorus*
- *giving one-word responses in a game*
- *mimicking puppet immersion language speech*

Collaborating with colleagues to model language responses

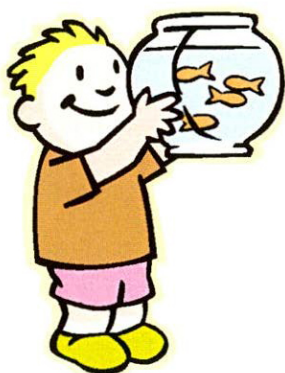
Main points

It is important that you collaborate with colleagues in providing opportunities to demonstrate a verbal response in the immersion language.

The ability to verbalize in the immersion language, using it spontaneously and independently of direct adult intervention or support, emerges following extended exposure to the immersion language.

Verbalization of an extended variety can also occur at a much earlier stage of development through, singing, rhymes, story-line choruses. These verbalizations usually happen in a participative group activity and are generally restricted to that activity.

Verbalization of a brief nature can be actively and deliberately sought in a 'prompt' situation where the child is cued to answer a question in the immersion language or complete an unfinished sentence in the immersion language. This can happen as part of the normal verbal interaction with children, during the course of the day, or when games designed to offer this sort of opportunity are played.



It is in activities of this nature that collaboration with colleagues to provide modelled verbalizations is most useful. It usually arises where staff collaboration, in seeking and giving specific verbal responses, is an essential ingredient in a planned game or story-telling activity. It may arise when a member of staff who is working alone with children needs input from a colleague to trigger verbal responses from them.

Exchanges between staff who are collaborating for this purpose are usually characterized by increased use of

colleagues' names, heightened intonation and facial expression, more deliberate physical gestures, and heightened emphasis on the language being modelled. Make sure that you draw on your colleagues' support in activities where children's imitation supports verbalization. Respond to openings from colleagues to facilitate them in a similar fashion.

ACTIVITY



Give some examples from a storytelling session or language game where you co-operated with a colleague in modelling verbal responses in the immersion language to support speech production from children. Give details of the activity and group size. Indicate whether the modelled response involved key language which had been part of the children's planned language experiences to date or whether it involved key language items within the current plan. It might be useful to detail the verbal exchange between yourself and your colleague in a dialogue form. Include references to facial expression, physical gestures or word emphasis.

In this section you have looked at ways in which you can support the emergence of children's ability to speak the immersion language. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- being familiar with the content of the language programme
- being familiar with the constituent parts of the language programme
- using techniques of repetition, restatement and expansion regularly in your verbal interaction with children
- directing repetition, restatement and expansion techniques at the language focus of the current language plan
- using repetition, restatement and expansion to consolidate and maintain key language items of past planning and

past experience

- using singing, rhymes, games, stories, puppets to support verbalization in the immersion language
- collaborating with colleagues to model verbalization

When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you are aware of:

- the stages of early home language development
- the stages of immersion language development in an immersion setting
- the differences and similarities between the two processes
- the characteristics of caretakerese
- some features of language structure

Unit 1

Section 4

Contributing to the planning and implementation of immersion language activities



Children learn language by hearing it so frequently that they begin to imitate it. The language needs of young children involve simple sentence patterns and basic grammatical structures, along with a range of appropriate vocabulary.

The emphasis on high levels of verbal interaction with children, as a critical element in providing a strong vigorous immersion language environment, ensures that they become familiar with sentence patterns which occur naturally again and again throughout the course of the day, and with their underpinning grammatical structures. They develop equal familiarity with a core of fixed phrases which are repeated regularly in association with routines and daily activities.

Developing familiarity with vocabulary is a greater challenge. The vocabulary needs of young children are considerable, reflecting their past experiences through the home language, their needs, wants, interests, their new experiences within the setting and their preparation for continuing education through the immersion language. Conscious planning is the only way to build up children's familiarity with this broad range of vocabulary need. This section looks at ways to help you contribute usefully and relevantly to the planning and implementation of immersion language activities which will bring this about.

Participating in and contributing to planning

Main points

It is important to participate in planning sessions to meet children's immersion language needs and to contribute useful ideas and suggestions.

There are many different approaches to planning, and settings vary in the way they plan, in terms of:

- frequency
- timescale
- written format

You need to be familiar with your setting's approach to planning. You need to be familiar with the written format of planning used, in particular that which focuses on the detail of key immersion language development.

ACTIVITY



Obtain examples of differing types of formats for planning used in an immersion language setting.

In order to participate in and contribute usefully to planning in your setting you must:

- be familiar with the overall content of the language programme
- be familiar with the organization of the programme into units, themes and topics
- be familiar with the content of the constituent parts of the programme
- know where the current unit fits in the overall sequence
- be familiar with the key language items in the current planning focus

Planning for immersion language learning must be carried out in the context of children's overall developmental needs. To participate in and contribute usefully to planning for immersion language development, therefore, you must also be familiar with the learning programme for other areas of children's development

The most productive planning for a language unit, theme or topic identifies a range of activities which:

- ensures frequent exposure to the relevant key language items
- offers children opportunities to develop in other developmental areas.

In making your suggestions and contributing your ideas to a language planning unit, think about:

- the general scope of activities available in the setting
- items of equipment in the setting which correspond directly to key items in the language planning focus, and where you might use these items
- books in the library corner or from the storytelling repertoire which contain references to key items in the language planning focus
- songs and rhymes in the setting's repertoire which contain references to key items in the language planning focus or how you might make up a simple song or rhyme which does
- games in the setting's repertoire and how they might be changed to accommodate key items in the language planning focus
- how you and colleagues might create a simple resource which provides direct correspondence to key items in the language planning focus and how you might use it
- how you might work with children to make items which correspond directly to key items in the language planning focus

Identify:

- opportunities to link current key language items with past key language items

Identify:

- activities which offer little or no opportunities for exposure to key items in the current language planning focus

Consider whether:

- they might offer consolidation of past language
- provide an initial familiarity with items of future planning

Think about children who:

- need extra support and how that need might be addressed
- need a greater challenge and how that need might be addressed



ACTIVITY



Keep a diary of planning sessions in your setting, detailing:

staff present

length of meeting

planning focus

issues arising

any contributions made by yourself



Retain completed planning sheets. Highlight or underline any suggestions made by yourself which were incorporated into the final plan.

Delivering planned language activities

Main points

It is important to participate in the delivery of planned language activities.

All members of the setting have a role in implementing activities which have been planned. This role may involve preparing for and setting up the activity as well as active participation in the activity. You may have responsibility for one or two activities where the nature of the activities or the language opportunities offered requires an ongoing staff presence. You may have a maintenance or supervisory role over a number of activities which requires you to interact with a number of different groups.

As has been mentioned earlier when discussing the significant elements in the provision and maintenance of a high quality language immersion environment, staff in an immersion setting usually play a more prominent role in children's activities than is the case in a home language setting. Staff interaction with children in an immersion setting is more

frequent, more obvious, more deliberately sought out. Your role in participating in planned activities is certainly about what you do, before and after the activity but it is mostly about what you do during the activity and, critically, about what you **say**.



In participating in planned activities with children you must interact positively with them. You cannot remain aloof and at a distance from them. Even if your role is one of maintenance and supervision you must find opportunities to sit with children and play with them. Keep the level of verbal interaction high – maintaining a sustained flow of language, making observations, comments, suggestions, asking questions and answering them yourself, describing, discussing, keeping up an ongoing commentary on what is happening or what you yourself or other children are doing.

Ensure that there is frequent reiteration of key language within the focus of the current plan. Practice the characteristics of caretakerese – sequential repetition, and restatement or expansion in the immersion language of utterances that the children have made entirely or partially in the home language. Ensure that your language is simple, and that you incorporate non-verbal clues, contextual, auditory, or visual.

Make sure you use opportunities to interact with your colleagues for the benefit of children:

- to increase frequency of exposure to key language areas
- to make meaning clear
- to provide a modelled verbal response

ACTIVITY



Describe your role in a recent planned language activity where you were given responsibility for the activity. Describe the activity, the equipment, the children present and the specific focus of the language exposure. Were you happy that you succeeded in providing frequent reiteration of the key language? Did you use opportunities for sequential repetition, restatement or expansion?

Did you sing a song or recite a rhyme as part of the activity? Did you initiate any dialogue with a colleague to enhance or increase language exposure? Was this a useful experience for children? Would you do anything differently if you were given this responsibility again?

Displays

Main points

It is important to contribute to the provision of displays which support the current focus of the language plan.

Display in a language immersion setting has the same value and purpose as display in a home-language setting. It adds to the creation of a stimulating and attractive environment for children. It provides an opportunity to record the activities and experiences of children. It offers an opportunity to stimulate children's curiosity and interest about something new. It provides focus for discussion. It informs families about children's learning.

Immersion language learning is interwoven through all the experiences of children in an immersion setting. In particular, planned focus on specific key language items is carried out, theme by theme, topic by topic, through a systematically unfolding language programme.

Display in an immersion setting should offer opportunities to reflect this progression. It might involve displays created by staff, or involve children's work. It might incorporate photographic displays of events and activities. It might concern practical objects for children to handle and examine. Staff have a role to play in:

- making suggestions at planning level
- putting displays together
- drawing children's attention to displays and using them as a basis for discussion.

In drawing children into discussion about what they see and enjoy in the setting's displays it is important that staff:

- keep in focus the key items of the language plan, present and past
- maintain a sustained flow of language
- use the broad range of appropriate communication techniques.

ACTIVITY



Take photographs of displays in which you had a planning or implementation role. Indicate the language theme of which they formed a part. Indicate the key language associated specifically with each display. Indicate opportunities to practice key items of past language planning.

Resources

Main points

It is important to use resources which support the current focus of the language programme.



Your setting should have a broad range of resources designed to support children's development across a broad range of developmental areas. Most of these resources will have been bought from commercial suppliers.

Your setting should have resources including games, picture-books, and lotto and bingo cards which have been created within the setting, or for the setting, to provide specific immersion language learning opportunities for children. You must be able to use these resources in the context of a language planning unit, with clear understanding of their specific language learning purpose, incorporating other developmental experiences and using the full range of relevant immersion language communication techniques.

ACTIVITY



Take photographs of resources which provide opportunities for specific language learning. Be prepared to explain how the resources are used, with how many children and their specific language purpose.

In this section you have looked at ways of contributing to the planning and implementation of activities to support immersion language development. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- planning for immersion language learning
- participating in planning sessions and putting forward relevant suggestions and ideas
- being familiar with the content of the language programme as a basis for useful participation in the planning process
- being familiar with the content of individual units of language planning and their place in the overall language programme
- addressing other developmental needs of children during the language planning process.
- addressing the individual needs of children
- using display to extend opportunities for language learning
- being familiar with the full range of resources in the setting and the scope for language learning they offer
- using resources which address specific language learning needs, effectively
- using the full range of immersion language communication techniques when participating in planned activities with children
- collaborating with colleagues in extending language learning opportunities in planned activities

When you have completed this section you should also be able to demonstrate that you are aware of:

- how your setting approaches planning for language
- the written format for planning for language which is practiced in your setting
- the role of display in an immersion language setting
- the need to create or commission resources which address specific items of immersion language learning

Unit 1

Section 5

Promoting and maintaining the interest, motivation and emotional well-being of children in an immersion setting



An early years immersion language setting is more intellectually demanding of children than a home language setting. In order to understand, children need to listen carefully to what is being said, interpret gesture, intonation, tone of voice and facial expression. They must relate what they see and feel to the context in which it is occurring. They must infer the most likely meaning of what is being said in this context, in the light of their past experience. They must combine all of this with whatever items of language they clearly understand and process all the information correctly. In order to speak they need to be able to recognize patterns in the language they hear and apply those patterns, drawing on an increasing repertoire of important words which are stored in their memory. Learners who are enjoying their learning, and who are relaxed and happy, are more successful in acquiring language than those who are not. This section looks at ways to help you contribute to an environment in which children feel happy, enjoy their experiences and experience success.

Atmosphere and encouragement

Main points

It is important to contribute to the development and maintenance of a happy, enthusiastic atmosphere, ensuring a high level of praise.

Children who are happy learn best. Children are happy when they have friends, are doing things that they enjoy and feel safe and secure in their relationships with the adults who care for them.

While a language immersion setting is more intellectually demanding of children than a home language setting it is also

more demanding of staff. Staff in an immersion setting must carry out the full range of the usual responsibilities associated with an early years setting – planning, preparation, clearing away, supervision of children, daily routines, maintaining relationships with children, colleagues and families. They must also carry the detail of the day to day implementation of the language programme.

To function effectively in the immersion language setting, staff must:

- maintain a high level of interaction with children, practical and verbal
- apply the full range of necessary communication techniques
- monitor children's levels of understanding
- encourage speech production
- remain on the alert for opportunities to extend the scope of planned language activities
- maintain within recall details of past planning
- collaborate consciously with colleagues to accelerate understanding or speech production

All of this requires high energy levels, physical and mental.

An immersion setting often reflects a quicker, more dynamic pace than a home language setting. Children are stimulated and motivated by an atmosphere which is animated and lively. Make sure that the animated and lively atmosphere does not become too excitable or frenzied. Make sure that you remain calm and assured. Make sure that your approaches to children remain open and warm. Make sure that your interactions with your colleagues on all occasions, formal and informal, are positive, friendly and outgoing. Praise children often and show your approval in words and gestures. Have a sense of fun. Enjoy your work and show it.

ACTIVITY



Note how often you and your colleagues praise children over a specific period of time. What are they praised for – behaviour, achievements in immersion language development, other

achievements? Is the praise verbal or physical – such as a pat on the head? Are children given reward stickers? Are children's achievements discussed positively with carers in the children's presence? Are all children being affirmed in some way through the comments and actions of staff?

Balancing the need to ensure children's involvement in specific language activities with their need for choice

Main points

It is important to show enthusiasm and interest around those activities which have particular scope for immersion language development while also respecting children's need for choice.



Successful immersion language learning involves a greater adult presence. This presence is demonstrated by the degree to which adults actively participate with children in activities, the extent of their language input, and how the day is organized to ensure maximum involvement of children in activities which facilitate exposure to key language items. There are a number of activities which are consistently useful in implementing the language programme.

These activities include songs, rhymes and games which can be tailored to cover most key language areas. They include 'making' activities where children actually produce key language items using a variety of materials. They include storytelling when stories can be selected or created with particular key language areas in mind.

Throughout these activities, adult participation, direction, and guidance is high and it is important that children want to take part in them. Some children may have a natural predisposition to become involved in them and require no particular persuasion. Some children need encouragement.

It is important that children come to expect these activities and their participation in them as a normal part of the setting's routine. However their regular presence on the menu of activities should not lead to monotony or turn them into a chore for you or children. It is important that children can see that you enjoy participating in these activities, and that you motivate their enthusiasm and interest by your tone of voice and your physical gestures. Enjoyment is infectious. If you enjoy these activities, the chances are that children will enjoy them and come to anticipate them.

From time to time, children might show reluctance to take part in an activity. Perhaps they want to finish something else. Perhaps they are enjoying something else better. There may be no obvious reason. An immersion language setting requires a more structured and directive approach than the home language setting, but it should not be inflexible. Children need to feel that they have some control over their actions and that they can exercise choice. Opportunities for choice should exist. Choice should be built into the structure of the day's planning in a way which does not undermine the balance of useful adult interaction. A choice not to take part in something should be handled constructively. It is important to remember that negative attitudes or responses in children will undermine the value of an activity.

ACTIVITY



Give a brief summary of activities provided in the setting today. Indicate those activities where children could exercise choice with regard to participating.



Describe, from your experience, how you responded during an incident where a child showed reluctance to participate in an adult-directed language activity for which you had responsibility. Describe the activity and the group size. Give some information about the child's personality, developmental levels and learning characteristics. Had the child shown a similar disinclination on some previous occasion?

The silent period

Main points

It is important to respect the 'silent period' which children experience as they internalise the immersion language.

All language learners go through what is called the 'silent period'. This is an extended period in the early stages of learning a language, where language is not produced, even when it might seem reasonable that it should be. A link between age and the length of the silent period has been identified. Secondary students may begin to speak after a month or so, primary students may need several months, younger children may need longer again.



A silent period is a normal part the language learning process. Its length is undoubtedly influenced by the quality, intensity or degree of language exposure as well as the learner's age. There are additional challenges in an immersion setting where children are already able to communicate in their first language and be understood. Their need to communicate in the immersion language therefore is not strong. Neither do younger children have a conscious desire to speak in a new language, a factor which may motivate older students. Within the early years immersion setting it seems likely that there may be a silent period of considerable length.

There are many ways of encouraging children to use the immersion language some of which have already been described. It is important not to try to force speech. Gentle persuasion during activities which may facilitate speech is beneficial. Impatience or frustration is counter productive.

ACTIVITY



Maintain a list of children's names on a chart along with their dates of birth, starting with the oldest child. Indicate their

starting date in the setting and the likely degree of exposure to the immersion language outside the setting. Note the date of their first immersion language utterance. Indicate whether the utterance was prompted or spontaneous. Do not count group verbalization.

Initial attempts at speech

Main points

It is important to respond positively to children's attempts at immersion language utterances and to remodel inaccurate immersion language utterances sensitively.

At some point, children in the setting begin to use the immersion language spontaneously. They will already have been verbalizing in the immersion language through participation with others in songs and rhymes. They may have used single words in prompted situations in games and stories.

Spontaneous use of the immersion language is a significant milestone in the language learning process. It happens when the child chooses, consciously or unconsciously, without prompting, to say something in the immersion language. It can range from a partial substitution of the immersion language for the home language – individual words or phrases – to complete sentences in the immersion language.

Initial attempts at complete sentences in the immersion language are sometimes grammatically incorrect. The word order might be wrong, or an inappropriate pronoun used. It is important that your responses to spontaneous utterances in the immersion language – whether grammatically correct or not – are positive. It is important, however, that inaccuracies are addressed.

Young children do not understand verbal explanations of

grammatical rules. Inaccurate utterances are best addressed through a remodelling of the child's utterance, using the technique of restatement to offer back to the child the correct version of what the child intended.

If you identify that a number of children are showing inaccuracy in the same area of language usage, repeated versions of the correct usage can be modelled through songs, rhymes, or games. If children hear something often enough they will eventually identify the underpinning rule.

Children's initial attempts to use the language spontaneously signify a major breakthrough in their learning. It is important that children are not undermined. Praise, encouragement, and positive reinforcement are essential if children are to build confidently on this development.

ACTIVITY



Give your verbal response to the following attempts at immersion language utterances:

*I want to play with that **bábóg** there (doll)*

*I must go to the **leithreas** (toilet)*

*She's very **dalba** (bold)*

*Give me the **dearg** one (red)*

*I want to **cuir** that in the **bocsa** (put) (box)*

***Ní rinne mise sin** (inaccurate verb use)*



Record further examples of children's attempts at immersion language utterances in your setting. Give your verbal response to each utterance.

In this section you have looked at ways of promoting the interest, motivation and emotional well-being of children in an immersion setting. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- contributing to a happy, enthusiastic atmosphere
- praising and encouraging children
- respecting children's need for choice
- motivating children's enthusiasm around those activities which are most central to the language learning process
- recognising the silent period in the language learning process
- responding positively to children's initial attempts to speak the immersion language

UNIT TWO

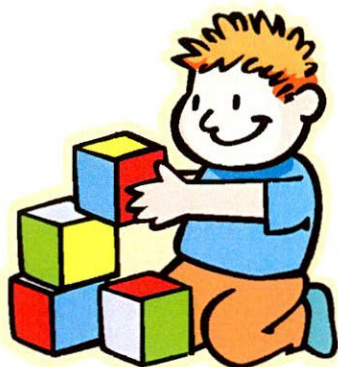


PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING THE PROVISION OF AN EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE IMMERSION ENVIRONMENT

- 1: Planning for immersion language learning using relevant frameworks and guidance**
- 2: Planning and organising the physical environment to optimize children's immersion language learning**
- 3: Planning and implementing specific activities and experiences to promote children's immersion language learning**
- 4: Monitoring and evaluating activities and experiences to promote children's immersion language learning**

Unit 2

Planning, implementing and evaluating the provision of an effective language immersion environment



What this unit is about

This unit is about delivering children's immersion language learning within a coherent structure. In the immersion language situation, there is limited exposure to the language and the ratio of speakers to learners is much lower than in the home language situation. The immersion language situation compensates for these factors through an organised, structured approach to the provision of learning opportunities, accompanied by consistent, reflective planning.

What you should be able to do and understand

When you have completed this unit you should be informed about planning, implementing and evaluating the provision of an effective language immersion environment.

You should know the importance of:

- planning for immersion language learning within the context of relevant statutory or advisory documentation
- planning for immersion language learning within the context of processes which underpin successful language learning
- planning systematically within the context of language themes or topics
- planning within the context of clear language objectives
- identifying activities which offer maximum opportunities for language learning
- providing for common language learning objectives across a range of concurrent activities
- recognizing how the physical environment of the setting impacts upon and reflects the language learning opportunities provided
- recognising the key role of play in motivating and

facilitating children's language learning

- ensuring language learning is integrated with provision for other crucial developmental areas
- organizing group activities in the context of common levels of language ability
- providing reasons for how staff roles and responsibilities are shared
- acting as a role model in exemplifying techniques of verbal interaction
- using assessment, monitoring and evaluation to enhance provision
- keeping appropriate records

You should know the importance of understanding:

- the purpose of language immersion education in your area
- the international context of language immersion education
- relevant aspects of immersion language research and their implication for your setting
- the priorities and requirements of the early years curriculum in your area
- how effectively the early years curriculum in your area addresses the needs of a language immersion curriculum

How the unit is organized

The unit is organized into four sections:

1. planning for immersion language learning using relevant frameworks and guidance
2. planning and organizing the physical environment to optimize children's immersion language learning
3. planning and implementing specific activities and experiences to provide for children's immersion language learning
4. monitoring and evaluating activities and experiences to promote children's immersion language learning

Unit 2

Section 1

Planning for immersion language learning using relevant frameworks and guidance



Learning to use language is the single most amazing accomplishment of young children's lives. The speed with which they learn is remarkable – beginning to recognize the purpose of language before they are one year old, moving from single word utterances to the basic forms of adult speech and applying a range of grammatical rules, within a further two years.

Children seem to learn language automatically, without difficulty solely by virtue of hearing it spoken. Researchers believe that the speed with which they learn to manage this complex task signifies that children have an innate predisposition to learn language. The rationale for early years language immersion education arises from this belief. However the conditions under which children learn an immersion language in an early years setting are significantly less favourable than those generally experienced in the home language environment.

This section looks at ways of optimising planning for immersion language development within the context of the challenges offered by the learning environment.

The local and international context

Main points

It is important to be aware of the international context of language immersion education and the similarities and differences between your language situation and others.

Language immersion is becoming an increasingly common feature of education world-wide. There are language immersion education projects in Canada, the USA, New Zealand, and in many parts of Europe, including Great Britain and Ireland. This form of education tends to be established in

the context of languages which have been in decline, and where an effective language revival movement has been established. Few other generalisations can be made, as the situation of language immersion education varies from language to language.

Language immersion education can be community-led or be an aspect of official language planning policy. The wider community can respond to it in a wide variety of ways; supportive, tolerant, indifferent or hostile, with either understanding or total ignorance of what is involved. There can be a wide variety in the relative strengths of the immersion languages in terms of numbers of native speakers, their age profile, social status and geographical distribution. Language status and language use within legal and administrative structures, and within the media, can also vary. The motivation of parents wishing their children to avail of language immersion education is equally various – often many of them do not speak the language themselves.

There are a number of different models of language immersion education – total or partial, early or late, within dedicated schools or as units or streams within a dominant language institution.

French immersion education in Canada, and its effects, has been the subject of the most comprehensive research carried out in this area. The findings of this research have added considerably to the confidence of those involved in language immersion projects in other parts of the world. However, it is important to be mindful of the dangers of applying research findings from one language situation to another quite different situation without also considering the impact of differing environmental and macro factors.

ACTIVITY



Give a brief history of your setting.



Find out about the strength of community support for the immersion language used in your project, and its support systems.

How many native speakers are there and what is their age profile?

How many people who are not native speakers are fluent?

Are there any areas where the immersion language is used exclusively or partially within the community?

How many preschools, primary schools, secondary schools or units are there?

How many children attend language immersion settings?

How many children in your setting use the immersion language as their home language?

What are the names of dedicated organisations and agencies and what are their roles?

Give the names of some magazines or newspapers, TV or radio programmes in the immersion language?

Give the names of any which are of benefit to children in your setting. Do not forget to consider the impact that dialectal differences might have on children's understanding?



Make a list of languages which figure in language immersion education projects in differing parts of the world. Choose two of them and give important information about each language situation, and about the nature of the language immersion education available.

Using relevant planning frameworks

Main points

It is important to use relevant frameworks and guidance to plan the language programme

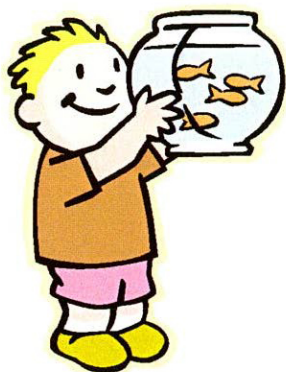
Most early years settings function within the context of a particular structure of provision. They might function as part of a care structure under the aegis of a health and social services department. They might function as part of an education structure under the aegis of an education department or authority. They might function within a structure which incorporates overlapping agencies. Whatever the regulatory body, all early years settings are expected to operate within certain parameters relating to premises, administration, staffing, the quality and nature of the physical environment, care and learning.

Purpose of immersion language early years settings

An immersion language early years setting has three complementary functions, each equally indispensable:

- the physical and emotional care of children in a safe and secure environment
- the provision of a wide range of relevant learning experiences which promote all aspects of children's development
- the provision of activities which promote a level of language competence compatible with the demands of the curriculum in subsequent immersion language education

There is obvious commonality between home language settings and immersion language settings. Regulations with regard to minimum standards relating to health and safety issues and premises, and with regard to appropriate administrative and management are the same. Care issues are the same.



However the immersion language situation brings significant differences into play with regard to curricular issues. These differences do not relate to the quality of the learning experiences being offered to children. Home language and immersion language settings both require the highest possible standards in terms of quality. The differences do not relate to the breadth of the curriculum experiences being offered. Children in an immersion language setting need opportunities to develop across all relevant curricular areas. They need opportunities to develop physically, socially, emotionally, personally and intellectually, and to experience the whole range of valuable activities offered by a home language setting.

The differences relate to the nature of the language need in the differing settings. Guidance and advisory materials which are designed to support learning in early years settings are frequently developed with a home language setting in mind. Judgements about quality, breadth and balance in children's learning experiences, the role of adults and the nature of the adult-child dynamic are informed therefore by a monolingual template. There is no basis for a common presumption that material formulated in the light of a home language context can be applied without modification to an immersion language context. The parameters of quality and excellence which apply to the home language context need to be renegotiated in the immersion language context. It is useful at this point to look at the varying language needs of children in these differing situations.

Keeping differences in mind

Main points

It is important to keep in mind the differences in need and context between home language and immersion language learning.

Need

In the home language early years setting the home language skills of most children are already well advanced. They understand what is being said. Speech is well established. The task of staff in a home language early years setting is to consolidate, extend and enrich language which is already developed to a significant degree, to support children in using language with increasing complexity, and to extend their use of language to new situations and purposes.

On the other hand, children entering an immersion language setting may have little or no immersion language skills. The task of staff in an early years immersion setting is to lay the basic foundation on which more complex language processes can be built. The foundation must be sufficiently solid to ensure that there is little or no delay in children's ability to address the full range of curricular areas in their continuing education through the immersion language.

Context

There are marked differences in the conditions under which children have learnt their home language and the conditions under which they are learning the immersion language. When children are in the process of learning their home language they hear it spoken:

- for prolonged periods of time
- by a variety of people
- inside and, generally, outside the home

Children are also members of a family group where most other members are already fully fluent or more fluent than the children, and where there are many opportunities for one-to-one communication.

NOTE

Research has indicated that by the age of six, the average child has listened to his home language for 17,520 hours and has vocalized for 2,190 hours

Within an immersion setting:

- the number of hours that a child can hear the language spoken is greatly reduced
- the child is a member of a larger group
- fluent speakers tend to be in the minority
- there are few opportunities for one-to-one communication
- there is frequently little or no back-up for the immersion language outside the setting.

Furthermore, the children already have language and the need to communicate and express themselves is fulfilled by their ability to use their home language. Consequently their motivation to acquire an additional language is not as urgent as the motivation to acquire their first.

Language learning and age

As has already been outlined, the rationale for early years immersion language learning is based on the belief, supported by research, that young children have an inherent predisposition and innate capacity to learn language. The credibility of early years immersion language learning has also been underpinned by claims for the superior ability of young children in language learning, based on investigations of the physical processes of brain development. Current research in language learning paints a complicated picture. Experts suggest that, whatever the outward appearance, the learning of language is in fact a complex and time-consuming task. Older children and adults, with their more highly developed intellect and more sophisticated learning strategies, have an enhanced ability to abstract, classify, analyse, generalise, see patterns and memorise. They are much more efficient at learning than younger children, who have not the same skills of analysis, memory or concentration.

On the other hand younger learners have two considerable advantages over older learners. Firstly, their pronunciation tends to be more accurate. Secondly, they have no preconceptions about language learning and do not suffer from the inhibitions about speaking a new language which often characterises older learners.

NOTE

The innate learning advantages of older learners, and their success, is frequently undermined by the language learning environment in which they typically find themselves. This is particularly true of adult learners. The context in which adult learners learn language is generally abstract. The principle of the 'here and now', the presence of concrete referents where they can see, hear, smell, touch and feel the topic under discussion, which characterizes much of the language directed at children, is usually absent.

Challenges**Main points**

It is important to be mindful of the additional challenges in an immersion language setting.

The provision of an environment which promotes immersion language learning in an early years setting presents staff with the significant challenges of:

- reduced exposure to the immersion language
- ratio of fluent speakers to learners
- children's immature learning strategies
- lack of any conscious motivation on the part of children to learn a new language

Addressing these challenges successfully requires an organized approach to the learning opportunities offered to children within the context of a clear structure. It includes:

- having a comprehensive overview of children's language learning needs
- planning for systematic exposure to key language areas or language items
- ensuring a highly visible adult presence in children's activities

- ensuring a high level of sustained verbal interaction from adults
- ensuring the participation of children in key language activities



The pedagogical approaches underpinning early years learning has been dominated by two main philosophical perspectives:

- the adult-dominated approach, which emphasizes the role of the adult in identifying and addressing the child's needs
- the child-centred approach, which emphasizes the role of the child as the prime mover in the learning process

There are advantages and disadvantages with each of these approaches. The adult-dominated early years setting can show too little regard for the active participation of children in their own learning, can undervalue the social, emotional and personal benefits to learning of a more child-centred approach and can fail to pay appropriate attention to children's development in independence, confidence and self-esteem.

On the other hand, the child-centred setting can lack sufficient rigour in terms of measurable outcomes of learning, can fail to differentiate between the various qualities of children's self chosen activities, and can undervalue the contribution that an adult presence makes to the quality of play.

No single blueprint for quality exists. A quality early years setting incorporates aspects of both adult-dominated and child-centred approaches, as appropriate. The immersion language setting, by its nature, requires a more directive and interventionist approach. Adult presence in children's activities is more frequent. There is a more predominating adult input in verbal interactions. This is inevitable. Children cannot discovery-learn a language. The adult cannot remain a discreet presence in the background, waiting for opportunities, initiated by children, to enrich their linguistic competence. At the same time, there is no place in the language immersion environment for a heavy-handed, coercive approach. Children need to enjoy their learning, feel comfortable with their carers, and experience some sense of control in their choices and decisions.

ACTIVITY



Gather information about the status of your setting – is it statutory, voluntary or private? What is its management structure?



Identify any agencies which have a regulatory input in your setting or carry a supportive or advisory role. Maintain guidance and advisory materials issued by regulatory and advisory bodies in a file dedicated to this purpose.



Consider reflectively the content of the guidance and advisory materials provided by regulatory and advisory bodies:

Do they contain any references to language immersion?

Do they contain specific information which supports you in providing quality language immersion experiences for children in your setting?

Do they indicate an understanding of the processes involved in immersion language learning?

Do they indicate an awareness of the issues and challenges of language immersion in the early years setting?

Naturally occurring high frequency exposure

Main points

The normal organizational routines of an early years setting, and the nature of adult communication with the age group, ensures substantial automatic exposure to aspects of the immersion language.

The central function of an early years immersion setting is to provide, in a natural, relevant and enjoyable way, activities which develop children's language skills effectively, in preparation for their continuing education in a language immersion system. There are two main stages in the

development of immersion language skills:

- the receptive stage, when children become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the new language and develop understanding
- the productive stage, when children use or begin to use the new language



In order to understand language, children must be exposed to it in situations where they have the visual, auditory and contextual clues to help them understand it. In order to produce language they need to remember the language they hear and understand. In order to remember it, they need to hear it frequently. The strategies that promote and facilitate language skills within both the receptive and productive stages, overlap to a considerable degree.

Importance of frequent exposure

The key element in language learning is exposure to the language. The more you hear a language the more likely you are to learn it. The more you hear a language the more likely you are to remember a core of regularly occurring words and phrases. The more you hear a language the more likely you are to become aware of patterns in sentence structures and to grasp the rules of how the language is organized. An effective immersion language early years setting involves, essentially, high levels of sustained input in the immersion language. Within this overarching principle, the early years language immersion setting incorporates a number of inherent advantages in facilitating naturally high levels of immersion language exposure. These advantages arise from:

- how adults instinctively respond to the maturity and conceptual levels of the age group
- the regularity of routines and activities

Maturity and conceptual levels

The language used with young children in an early years setting – whatever the language – must reflect the maturity and conceptual levels of young children, their interests, their needs and their wants. It needs to be simple, to involve a relatively narrow range of sentence patterns and grammatical

structures. In the immersion situation, where emphasis is placed on a high level of sustained language flow from staff, this restricted range of sentence patterns and structures is presented to children regularly throughout the course of the session. They therefore develop a strong familiarity with them without the need for any substantial conscious planning on the part of the staff. It is important, however, for all staff to be aware of the range of sentence patterns which run through much of the language used with children.

Regularity of routines and activities

Within an early years setting there is a regularity and consistency throughout the course of each day in terms of:

- routines regarding: entry, departure, toileting, clearing away, eating and drinking, etc.
- social interaction regarding: welcome, farewell, praise, encouragement, admonishment, supervision, care, conflict resolution, etc.
- the range of the play activities provided: sand, water, art, construction, role play, jigsaws, dough, etc.

These regular routines and activities have a significant impact on the children's exposure to important elements of the immersion language. The language of various organizational routines, and the language of social interaction, are heard frequently on a daily basis. The language which is specific to particular play activities is heard regularly, while that core of language which is common to a number of play activities is heard several times on a daily basis.

NOTE

Where there is more than one way of saying a particular thing, it is important for staff, in order to ensure consistency, to come to an agreement about the form to be used. As children develop familiarity with a particular form, diversity can be introduced.

It is important to be aware of the language which is associated with daily organizational routines as well as the



fixed phrases and simple sentences of social interaction which appear frequently. It is important to be aware of the words and phrases relating to play activities – those which are specific to a particular activity, those which are common across a number of activities. A knowledge of the range of simple sentence patterns and their underlying grammatical structures, along with common social and organizational language, is critical for staff whose personal language immersion skills are still developing.

ACTIVITY



Over a period of time, identify sentence patterns which occur regularly in verbal interchanges with children. These will include sentences relating to having, liking, wanting, needing, being able to do things. There will be sentences relating to position and place. There will be substantial order or instruction sentences. There will be a high proportion of sentences in the present tense and with 'is' or 'are'. There will be regular use of positive, negative and question forms.



Over a period of time, identify and detail the core social and organizational language used in the following contexts:

- *greeting and farewell*
- *toileting and washing*
- *dressing and undressing*
- *serving food and drink,*
- *praising*
- *comforting a distressed child*
- *addressing inappropriate behaviour*
- *organizing children's movement in the setting*
- *organizing children's participation in transition from one activity to another*
- *organizing children's participation in tidying up*



Over a period of time, identify and detail core organizational language which is common to participation in a range of play activities.

Planning principles

Main points

It is important to plan for deliberate exposure to aspects of the immersion language through the organization of the language programme into coherent systematic themes or topics.

Minimal planning, if any, is required in those language areas where substantial exposure is virtually guaranteed. Little planning is needed regarding: the restricted scope of the sentence patterns and the grammatical structures which feature most predominantly in the early years language immersion setting; language arising from consistency and regularity in the range of play activities and organizational routines; and the core phrases and simple sentences which constitute much of the social interaction between staff and children.

Ensuring high levels of exposure in relation to vocabulary is more of a challenge. The potential vocabulary needs of children in an early years immersion setting involves hundreds if not thousands of words. Addressing the issue of appropriate exposure in the context of vocabulary requires a clear planning structure. A clear planning structure ensures that:

- optimum use is made of the time available
- children are exposed to vocabulary in a controlled way
- existing levels of vocabulary can be built on systematically
- the efforts of all adults are concentrated more efficiently in maximizing language exposure and consolidation
- elements of progress can be assessed



Identification of vocabulary needs

The first step in developing a clear planning structure is to identify that vocabulary which is most important or useful to children's needs. Relevant vocabulary will include words relating to:

- children's physical, emotional, personal and social needs.
- children's learning needs

Relevant vocabulary will include:

- high frequency words within home language experience and usage
- high frequency words which are not within home language experience and usage, but which should be
- high frequency words that reflect the core experiences within the setting
- words that can be used within a practical context and whose meaning can be demonstrated by sight, hearing, touch, smell or feeling
- words that are relevant to the children's cognitive levels and experiences

Relevant vocabulary will include:

Type	Example
nouns	girl
adjectives	small
verbs	run running
adverbs	quickly

A comprehensive range of words might be identified within the context of the following categories: family, playing, colours, size, animals, people, toys, clothes, body, house, garden, weather, transport, food and drink, friends, emotions.

While the first fundamental step in planning for conscious exposure to vocabulary in an early years immersion setting is the identification of relevant vocabulary, a further step is required. The second step requires the devising of a system whereby exposure to the hundreds – maybe thousands – of words identified might be addressed. A useful way to do this is to:

- break the vocabulary down into manageable units on the basis of themes or topics
- allocate a period of time to each during which exposure to identified vocabulary is a central focus of language usage and verbal interaction with children across a range of planned and spontaneous activities.

ACTIVITY



Make a list of the language themes and topics in your setting.



Over a period of time identify the key vocabulary, within each theme or topic area, which will be the focus for planned language exposure.

Ensuring progression and continuity in children's learning

Main points

It is important to organize language themes and topics in a way which promotes progression and continuity in children's learning.

When planning for high level vocabulary exposure in a language immersion setting, there are a number of different types of progression which need to be addressed.



Building blocks of language

In all languages it is clear that some types of vocabulary have a more fundamental or central function than others. If we refer back to home language learning and the stages children go through in language production, we notice that nouns predominate in early language production. Initial single word utterances involve the usage of the same noun in a variety of contexts to convey a range of different meanings. For example, the use of the word 'ball' might mean that the child:

- is indicating where the ball is
- is asking where the ball is
- wants the ball
- has the ball
- is indicating that some-one else has the ball

When the child begins to use two-word utterances, again nouns predominate and again can convey a variety of meanings. For example, 'dog ball' might mean:

- the dog has the ball
- the dog has my ball
- the dog wants the ball
- the dog is running away with the ball

Sometimes the noun might be used with what are called pivot words to convey a more precise meaning, for example:

- ball gone
- mammy gone
- milk gone

Replicating the linguistic immaturity of the child, a tourist who lacks proficiency in speaking the native language of another country, can make a reasonable attempt to converse and make himself understood using nouns alone and appropriate gestures:

vino – mmmm – rubbing tummy

el sol – phew – wiping forehead

On the basis of this sort of evidence, it seems that nouns might have a greater priority in the immersion language learning process than other words – that they might be the fundamental building blocks of the language. In the

context of progression therefore, it seems that nouns within each language theme or topic should constitute the initial central focus of high level exposure.

Progression in themes

The most effective way of addressing the broad range of children's vocabulary needs is to develop a thematic or topical approach to vocabulary exposure. The sequencing of themes or topics is largely a matter of choice. However, it is useful to consider any links that might exist between topics or themes – how the language of one theme or topic might act as a natural foundation for the language of another. A theme on 'our clothes', might arise from a 'my body' theme. 'Halloween' might build on a 'food' theme or vice versa. 'Christmas' might act as a jumping off point for a 'toys' theme or a 'toys' theme might develop into a 'Christmas' theme. A 'colours' theme or 'big and small' theme might be delayed until a firm base of nouns have been established.

What needs to be remembered is that:

- one layer of language acts as the basis for the next
- recently acquired or established language needs to be consolidated
- established language needs to be maintained

Two-cycle approach

We have already described the importance of nouns as fundamental building blocks in language learning. However not all nouns have equal importance or relevance. Indeed other words which are not nouns might have more importance or relevance than some nouns. In an 'animals' theme the word 'dog' has a higher priority than 'crocodile'. In a 'body' theme 'hand' has a higher priority than 'thumb'. It might be appropriate to think in terms of two levels of prioritisation in relation to vocabulary exposure, or in terms of two cycles of themes or topics. The first cycle addresses all the high priority vocabulary within each theme or topic. The second cycle addresses the less important vocabulary and provides a

further opportunity to revisit and consolidate vocabulary of the first cycle.

ACTIVITY



Look at the key vocabulary lists associated with your themes and topics. Prioritize the relevance or importance of the vocabulary in each list using a number or star system.



Detail the sequencing of themes and topics in your setting in the form of a schedule with, a time allocation. 'Make sure you allow for the initial settling-in period. Indicate any links between themes or topics, or how one theme or topic provides consolidation of a previous theme or initial preparation for a subsequent theme.

Progression in sentence patterns and grammatical complexity

The characteristics of language use with young children reflects simplicity in the sentence patterns and a lack of grammatical complexity. Within those limitations however there is substantial variety. High levels of language input from staff, used naturally and relevantly in a variety of situations, contexts and activities, ensure that children are exposed to a wide range of this language regularly.

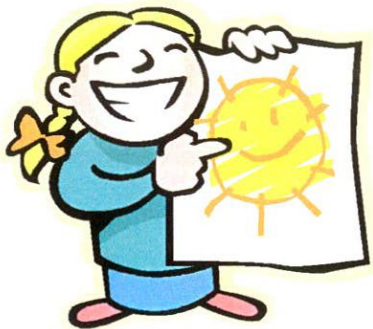


While a systematic approach to key vocabulary items and a progressive build-up of vocabulary is desirable, this is not appropriate in relation to sentence patterns and their underlying grammatical rules. To try to replicate the same controlled exposure to sentence patterns and grammatical rules as is used for vocabulary building would distort natural speech, if not totally undermine basic communication. The key to progression in terms of increasing grammatical complexity is children's comprehension. As children's maturity and levels of understanding increase, as greater complexity appears in the activities and situations in which language is used, instinctive, nearly automatic changes are made by adults in the level of complexity of language used.

Clarity in language learning objectives

Main points

It is important to ensure that planning indicates clear learning objectives.



Planned vocabulary exposure in an immersion setting should provide opportunities to address four levels of language exposure:

- introduce children to new vocabulary
- practice and consolidate language of past planning to which they have already been exposed
- maintain established language
- develop an initial familiarity with the vocabulary of future planning

The predominating learning opportunities of planned language exposure in a language immersion setting relate to exposure to new vocabulary. Effective planning for vocabulary exposure requires a comprehensive overview of the content of the language programme, and the coherent sequencing of language themes within the context of identified priority vocabulary. It then requires a further breakdown of planned exposure to new vocabulary to shorter daily, weekly or bi-weekly time slots. The identification of specific language objectives in such detail ensures a focused and concentrated momentum regarding interaction with children during these shorter time slots.

It ensures a more effective recall of the detail of recent planning, facilitating practice and consolidation of that language. Knowledge of the overview and the sequencing of language themes supports staff in maintaining established language and anticipating areas of future vocabulary exposure effectively.

Specific language objectives, within the context of an overall structure and approach, ensure that staff can address any of the four levels of language learning separately or in

combination. It also ensures that while there is an obvious reiteration of identified key priority vocabulary within a specific period of time there is no distortion or artificiality in the language used. Children continue to be exposed to an increasingly broad range of vocabulary – nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs – and a variety of sentence patterns and underpinning grammatical rules from within the four levels of language exposure.

ACTIVITY



A parent has asked you about the specific immersion language work you have been doing in the setting during the past couple of days. 'What can you say? Describe some of the activities.

NOTE

It is important to remember that vocabulary from outside the four levels of language exposure is not to be avoided if it is relevant and appropriate to the context. Non-verbal clues along with children's explicit understanding of key words will ensure that there is no obstacle to children's understanding.

Core activities in planned language learning

Main points

It is important to maximize those opportunities which offer greatest potential for planned language learning.

Opportunities which offer children the greatest potential for planned language learning involve:

- a sustained adult presence
- a more directive adult role

Most of these opportunities fortunately, arise within activities for which children have an existing propensity or liking, or for

which staff can develop an enthusiasm in children. They are activities which facilitate language learning at receptive and productive levels both.

Stories

Children love stories. They love them in a group setting, large or small – the dramatic interpretation of the story-teller, the participative choruses. They love the intimacy of a story told quietly to them on their own. They love to hear the same stories again and again. Story-telling offers significant advantages when repeated exposure to key language items is critical. It allows the retelling of the same story on a number of occasions within a short space of time. It allows the retelling of the same stories at different times over a protracted period of time, allowing for increasingly complex levels of immersion language competence.

ACTIVITY



Ensure that you maintain information on books used in story-telling sessions, indicating the themes and topics which they most usefully support. Include, if appropriate, references to specific language items or objectives.



Songs and rhymes

Children like to sing and recite rhymes, particularly when they are accompanied by actions or percussion. It is important to develop a broad repertoire of songs and rhymes for children, from existing collections or composed by staff. Songs and rhymes composed by staff can be directed at particular play activities or arise from a story-telling session. They can provide opportunities for repetition of key vocabulary and sentence patterns. Composed songs and rhymes can provide useful opportunities for 'drills'. A repertoire of simple catchy tunes ensures that nearly any sentence pattern can be easily and quickly put to a tune. Important sentence patterns, incorporating key vocabulary, can be sung on many occasions in a variety of activities and situations throughout the course of a session.

Singing and reciting rhymes provides considerable opportunities for extended verbalization in the immersion language without any pressure being put on children, or any sense that they have been put on the spot. It is particularly useful for shy or reticent children. Singing and reciting rhymes gets children into the way of using the language before they have reached the stage of spontaneous language production. While it is not essential that children understand all that they are saying in these activities, it is important that they understand some of what they are saying. Singing and saying rhymes should be a regularly occurring activity in the early years immersion language setting, not only as a specific time-tabled event, but as part and parcel of other activities.

ACTIVITY



Put together a file containing the songs and rhymes which are in use in your setting. Against each song or rhyme indicate the language theme(s) or topic(s) where it can most usefully be employed.

Games

Games are particularly useful in encouraging single word responses in the immersion language:

- games with picture dice or picture skittles
- games such as 'what's missing' or 'pass the parcel'
- physical games, games with music, sorting games, games with a 'feely bag'

A vast repertoire of games is not required. The same games can be adapted to suit the current focus of language exposure. The illustrations on the dice and skittles can be changed to refer to different key vocabulary. The variety of objects on the 'what's missing' tray can reflect the current language focus. The objects hidden in the parcel or feely bag can vary. Physical games, or games with music, might involve the same routine, or same music, but the focus of the language exposure is different.

ACTIVITY



Ensure that you maintain information on language-specific games indicating the language themes, topics, language items and objectives which they most usefully support.

Puppets

Puppets can be used in a variety of contexts in an early years immersion setting – story-telling, singing, reciting rhymes, games, giving the children instructions.



The use of puppets in an early years immersion setting may provide two significant advantages. Firstly, for many children the immersion setting may be the first context in which they encounter a puppet. When the puppets are made available to the children, the children's imitation of their behaviour may well include their language behaviour. Puppets can support children in verbalizing or attempting to verbalize in the immersion language. The children's 'puppet' speech may involve meaningful language, repetition without understanding, or even nonsense words – the children's approximation of the language they hear.

However, puppets may be useful in a more significant way. It is known from research into language learning, that children pay more attention to and are more influenced by the language of their peers than by the language of their teachers or parents. Children moving to a foreign country will pick up children's street dialect more quickly than they pick up the standardized version of the language offered by their teachers. The emergence of an 'immersion dialect' in language immersion programmes is put down to the influence of children's language inaccuracies on each other as they attempt to speak the immersion language.

In an early years language immersion setting, staff are generally the only source of the immersion language – children have not yet begun to speak in the immersion language and are influencing one another as far as the home language is concerned. The introduction of a proxy peer in the

form of a puppet or a range of puppets may well have an influence on children in terms of:

- enhancing their listening skills
- encouraging them to speak the immersion language

Puppets should be used regularly in the setting particularly 'boy' and/or 'girl' puppets

ACTIVITY



Keep a log of the use of puppets during adult-directed language activities in small or large group activities. Note any improvements in children's listening skills or ability to concentrate, particularly children whose listening and concentration are poor. Pay particular attention to enhanced immersion language use amongst children.

Making things

One of the most important factors in learning language is having the concrete referents at hand, something that the learner can see, hear, feel, touch or smell. The process of actually making the items which are the focus of the language exposure is a useful way of providing the concrete referent. Children can be helped to make many of the noun components of the language exposure focus, through, painting, glueing, cutting out; using paper, cardboard, cloth, boxes and a variety of accessories such as beads, pasta, ribbons, buttons, straws, and many others. They can be involved in the process of making their own individual items or they can contribute to a collaborative piece of work, collage or illustration.

If they bring their individually made items home the items can act as a continuing reminder of the language experience around it, particularly if relevant vocabulary lists have been given to families. Alternatively, children's work can contribute to display in the room, act as a focus for discussion and recall activities in verbal interactions with staff. These 'making' activities should be provided on a regular basis, but it is important to remember that staff presence and verbal

interaction arising from the activity are at least as important as the finished product.

NOTE

While activities relating to making things demonstrate some of the external characteristics of artistic or creative activities, 'making' activities are essentially language activities. They do not substitute for the genuine artistic and creative experiences which should also be provided in the setting.

ACTIVITY



Make a photographic record of real items that children have made. Indicate the language themes, and topics, which have given rise to them, and provide a short description of the sentence patterns and vocabulary which have been supported through the process of making each item.

Immersion language learning processes

Main points

It is important that planning reflects and accommodates the processes underpinning immersion language learning.



There are a number of factors which must be taken into account if you are to plan effectively for immersion language learning. The following constitute those which are most relevant in an early years setting.

Environment and exposure

The quality of the learning environment is the critical factor in learning a new language. Children learn language by hearing it spoken. The more language they hear the more likely they are to learn it. The immersion language environment differs significantly from the environment in which children have

learnt and continue to learn their home language. The immersion environment cannot hope to replicate the favourable conditions of home language exposure in terms of time, ratio of fluent speakers to learners or support outside the setting. A more intense and concentrated approach is needed to make optimum use of the time and resources available. Extensive, vigorous exposure requires high levels of language input from staff with children during all activities. Planning should ensure that activities which allow this to happen predominate during the course of the day and that all staff are aware of their role in sustaining a high level of verbal interaction.

Natural exposure

There are two main contexts for language learning – the formal and what some theorists have described as ‘natural’ exposure. The formal context refers to the situation where the focus of learning is on the form of the language, grammatical rules and language accuracy. The natural context, on the other hand, focuses on the content of the communication. While adults typically learn a new language in a formal context, the formal context is inappropriate for young children. An immersion situation, which may draw on aspects of the formal method, at a later stage, in the early years setting is based exclusively on natural exposure. All language should arise and be used in situations which are meaningful to the children, incorporate high levels of enjoyment and motivation and be relevant to their conceptual maturity, their needs, wants and interests.

The ‘here and now’ principle

Children learn language by hearing it spoken in situations where they have the contextual, visual and auditory clues to help them understand it. Communication in the immersion language early years setting should involve a context in which children can see, hear, feel, touch or smell the subject under discussion. Language learners learn most effectively when language is directed at activities or events which are happening here and now, activities which are not at a remove in time or space. Communication with children in the

immersion language in an early years setting should arise from and be based on activities where there is a high level of hands-on, practical participation by children.

Stages in language learning

There are two stages in language learning – the receptive and productive stages. During the receptive stage, children listen to the immersion language but do not use it. They may give no response at all, or nod or carry out an instruction or direction. During the productive period, children start to use the language spontaneously inserting, with increasing frequency, words, phrases and sentences into utterances made mainly in the home language. Sustained production in the immersion language emerges gradually. Reciting rhymes and singing songs are not evidence of productive skills. The main thrust of initial activities in an early years immersion setting is not directed primarily at getting the children to speak the language. It is concerned mainly with the development of comprehension.



The silent period

All children go through a 'silent period' in language learning. Researchers believe that this period of language incubation is a necessary part of the language learning process. They believe that learning situations where learners are allowed to remain silent, or respond in their home language, may be the most effective approach for the early stages of language learning. Age seems to be a factor in the length of the silent period, with younger learners requiring a silent period of greater length. Planning should take account of this phenomenon. Activities to promote early speech production should not be attempted prematurely.

Enjoyment

Research has indicated that the less anxious the learner, the better language learning proceeds. Young children in an immersion language setting have no real consciousness of learning a new language. They do not suffer from the anxieties and inhibitions which typify the attitudes and

behaviours of adult learners, who are frequently concerned about failure and self-image.

However, children's learning will be adversely affected if they are unhappy or anxious, whether this be based on personality, activities which are beyond their conceptual and developmental levels, or unsatisfactory relationships with other children or adults. It is important that children are involved in activities which they enjoy, which are matched to their conceptual and developmental levels, and in which they experience approval and a sense of achievement. While language immersion settings involve a more directive adult role, children should not be placed in situations where they are coerced or pressurized.

It is important that children feel safe and secure in the environment of the immersion setting, that they can develop positive relationships with other children and adults, and that there are opportunities for them to show initiative, work independently, and make their own choices.

ACTIVITY



Reflect on any experiences you may have had of learning a new language. Did you find learning a new language a challenge which you enjoyed, or did you find it difficult and stressful? What factors contributed positively to your experience? What factors contributed negatively to your experience? Do you think that the processes underpinning immersion language learning which you have learnt about might usefully have been applied to your own experiences? The application of which of these processes would have added most significantly to your own learning?

In this section you have looked at planning for immersion language learning within the context of broad frameworks and basic principles. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- drawing appropriately on statutory guidance materials
- drawing on guidance material specific to language immersion
- implementing a comprehensive, detailed language programme
- being familiar with naturally occurring exposure to aspects of the immersion language
- being familiar with the range of sentence patterns which typify immersion language usage with young children
- being familiar with the core organizational and social immersion language in use in the setting
- ensuring a thematic approach in planned language exposure
- building progressively on children's language skills
- ensuring clear language objectives
- enhancing language learning through songs, rhymes, stories, games, puppets, making things

When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you are aware of:

- the need for a more adult-centred balance in the early years language immersion setting
- the stages of immersion language learning
- the factors which impact on effective immersion language learning
- the challenges of the language immersion setting
- the importance of research in the area of language learning
- the international context of language immersion programmes.

Unit 2

Section 2

Planning and organising the physical environment to optimize children's immersion language learning

Resources, equipment, lay-out and display within the physical environment all contribute to the quality of children's care and learning. The demands of a language immersion setting require a close scrutiny of aspects of the physical environment. This section looks at ways of using the physical environment to enhance immersion language learning.

Selecting physical resources

Main points

It is important to select physical resources for the language immersion setting with the language programme in mind.



The setting's equipment and materials are the resources through which children develop their skills and abilities. They have a significant impact on the quality and variety of the learning experiences available to children, with regard to overall developmental areas, and with regard to immersion language learning in particular.

In the home language early years setting, a comprehensive range of equipment and materials is needed to ensure appropriate variety and range in maintaining enthusiasm, interest and progression in all areas of development. A badly equipped setting creates frustration amongst staff, generates problems of boredom amongst children, undermines effective learning and can lead to problems of discipline and disruption.

In the home language setting, equipment is generally chosen with a number of things in mind:

- the maturity and developmental levels of children
- attractiveness

- safety
- hygiene
- space
- ease of storage
- value for money

These considerations hold equally true in the immersion language setting. However careful thought must also be given to how well resources and equipment address the immersion language needs of children in relation to:

- the overall language programme
- the language themes and topics
- specific language objectives
- ensuring concurrent exposure to specific language items across a range of activities.

While it is not on the basis of its language scope alone that a piece of equipment is chosen or rejected, the language potential of any piece of equipment requires particular attention and consideration.

Ensuring concrete referents

Main points

It is important to ensure a broad range of concrete referents in the selection of equipment and materials.

The main focus of planned language exposure in an immersion setting is in the area of vocabulary, with a particular emphasis on nouns. One essential component of effective language learning involves concrete referents – the availability to the learner of things which can be seen, heard, felt, touched or smelt during discussion or conversation.

Sorting, matching, accessory equipment

It is important that the setting has a comprehensive range of concrete referents reflecting the planned vocabulary exposure in the form of jigsaws, lotto, bingo, matching cards, along

with model animals, food, transport and people, to be used in table top activities, floor activities or as accessories to larger equipment. A wide variety of junk material, paper and cardboard, allows children to make their own concrete referents or contribute to pictures, collages, or illustrations which incorporate concrete referents reflecting the current language plan.



Role play

Particular attention should be paid to materials for role play in the house corner, shop, café or hospital where the possibility of having a broad range of actual-sized items exists. Dressing-up clothes chosen with care can transform children into a range of characters, human and animal. Puppets can be human or animal-based and are useful props in many activities including story-telling.

Furniture, storage and large equipment

Carefully selected furniture and storage systems can provide useful references for the practice and consolidation of colour. Sand and water trays are available in differing colours, shapes and sizes. Transparent water trays allow for experimentation with colour. Sand comes multicoloured. Library furniture disguised as various animals or forms of transport is available. Large outdoor equipment incorporates many forms of transport in actual or mini size.

ACTIVITY



Does your setting contain an appropriate collection of items – actual size, models, puppets or items of pictorial representation – which reflect the key vocabulary identified in your planned cycle of language themes and topics? Where are the most significant gaps? Use a catalogue or visit a retail outlet. List items which might address these shortcomings.

Choosing story books

Main points

A library of story books is a critical resource. It is important to choose books with discrimination.

The general principles which govern the selection of books and stories for young children in the home language setting have equal relevance to the immersion situation. Stories should have the following characteristics:

- simple plots and uncomplicated story-lines
- easily understood concepts
- generally one main character
- children should be able to relate to most aspects of the story: characters, feelings, events, situations and details
- one illustration for each main scene or event in the story
- illustrations should be clear, uncluttered and recognisable, with strong bold lines and clear vivid colours

NOTE

In the language Immersion context, particular attention should be paid to illustrations in a story book. Illustrations supply the main contextual and visual clues which support children's ability to follow and understand the story.

The following characteristics and themes tend to be prominent in the stories which children enjoy most:

- families
- children
- animals
- naughty children and animals
- everyday characters: milkman, shopkeeper, doctor
- toys
- humour
- stories with a chorus
- cumulative stories
- repetition

Of major relevance to the immersion language situation, of course, is the selection of books and stories on the basis of their potential for addressing the language programme and achieving specific objectives within planned themes or topics.

One does not need an immense repertoire of stories in order to maintain enthusiasm amongst children and to maintain language progression. Firstly, children like to hear the same stories repeated. This is particularly useful in an immersion language situation. Secondly, over a period of time, as children's competence increases, stories can be told and retold using differing levels of language.

These differing levels of language relate, not only to the way in which the teacher might deliberately use a story to promote development in differing language areas, but also to the way in which her own use of language changes as she instinctively responds to children's increasing proficiency.

NOTE

In creating a suitable repertoire of stories, one should not feel restricted to those stories written in the immersion language. There may be a much wider selection in the home language. As you do not read the story but tell the story, the language in which it is written is irrelevant.

NOTE

Fairy stories are not usually suitable for very young children. The plot is often too long and too complex, and usually requires a fairly sophisticated level of language competence from children. Sometimes the moral values underpinning the story – beautiful equals good and ugly equals bad – are questionable.

ACTIVITY



Give your reasons for a recent story-book purchase. Refer to how the content, illustrations and the storyline help support the language programme. Has it a specific relevance to any of the planned language themes and associated identified key vocabulary? Has it a more general language use? What opportunities does it offer for repetition of key vocabulary of present, past or future planning?



Look at a storybook in your setting's library. Cover the text. Does the storyline and sequencing of events remain clear?

Making choices

Main points

It is important to reflect carefully when choices have to be made with regard to purchases.

Where a choice is to be made, either as the result of diversity within a range of similar types of equipment, or due to pressure of money or space, the language advantages of one piece of equipment over another might be the criterion by which the ultimate decision is made.

For example, if there are a number of attractive jigsaws available, all of which are equally suitable for the age group in terms of appeal and difficulty level, a cursory glance may indicate no particular advantage of one over the other. However, a closer scrutiny may indicate that some of them have greater potential for language development in terms of the overall language programme or specific themes. Again, if space is limited, a house corner has more scope for language than a slide, although the slide might present a more attractive proposition to some children. If money is limited,

puppets might be a more worthwhile investment than cuddly toys.

Although the language factor is a major criterion in the choice of equipment, there may be occasions when equipment should not be excluded just because it has less value in promoting particular aspects of language development.



Sand and water trays are both costly items. In the conventional home language setting, these items are a rich source of home language development and mathematical and scientific experiences. In the immersion language setting, the language of the children is at too basic a level initially for this potential to be properly exploited. When the children have reached a more complex level of language competence, these items will be more beneficial. In terms of return for money, it could be argued that, in the immersion language setting, the money could be spent more usefully.

On the other hand, young children enjoy water and sand play – developing skills of muscular control and hand-eye co-ordination as they dig, fill, empty and pour; observing the natural characteristics of water and sand; noting things which float, sink and dissolve; discussing with their peers their observations and actions; unconsciously absorbing information which is laying the foundation for later mathematical and scientific concepts. The main advantage of sand and water play at this stage, is for staff time. With up to four children, happily and gainfully employed, and requiring minimum supervision, staff are released to concentrate on more urgent language areas with other children.

Art activities are in a similar category. In creative art, where children hold the central position, and where children decide what direction their creative energy will take, there are limited opportunities to introduce and practise specific language objectives within the context of planned language themes or units. This however, does not constitute grounds for excluding art activities from the setting. Creative art has immense advantages for children. It develops the imagination, gives personal satisfaction and enhances self esteem, promotes

manual dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination, develops awareness of colour, space and texture. These benefits far outweigh any shortcomings in relation to the specifics of the immersion language programme.

ACTIVITY



Your setting requires additional equipment to support the children's learning in a number of developmental areas, including immersion language. However, a limited budget has forced you to prioritize in relation to purchasing additional equipment. Give reasons for the choice you have made in either prioritising the immersion language needs of the children, or not.

Getting the best from available resources

Main points

It is important to maximize the use of available physical resources to support delivery of the language programme.

The quality, quantity and range of resource materials and equipment in the early years language immersion setting has a significant role to play in the delivery of quality provision. In an ideal world, a setting will have the full range of all necessary materials and equipment, in the quantity and to the degree required. In reality however, due to factors of space or finance, most settings function with less than they want or require.

Providing that:

- shortcomings are identified,
- an action plan is in place to address them,
- and**
- there are no major shortcomings,
- then**
- imaginative or thoughtful use of existing resources,

- increased emphasis on activities which offer maximum potential for planned language learning,
can compensate for deficiencies in the short-term.

ACTIVITY

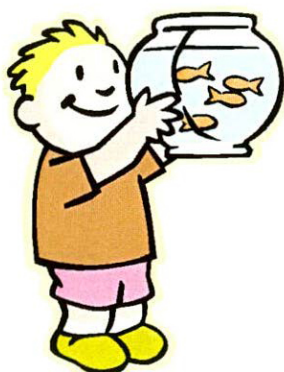


You are reporting to your line manager or your management committee on the issue of resources in your setting. Identify shortcomings – quality, range, quantity, purpose. Refer to the challenges this presents in addressing quality provision. Make reference to play and language learning both. Provide a priority purchase action plan.

Organizing layout to support verbal interaction

Main points

It is important to organize furniture and equipment to reduce intrusion in verbal interaction between staff and children.



An early years setting is a busy place. Children are involved in a variety of differing experiences – playing together, playing independently, moving about the room, handling a variety of equipment, seeking the attention and help of staff, chatting with one another, chatting with staff, co-operating with one another, sometimes disagreeing and falling out with one another. Staff are working with children, preparing, directing, supervising activities, talking to children for a variety of purposes, addressing a variety of needs, engaging with one another.

All early years settings display a fairly consistent level of noise, activity and movement at most times. An early years language immersion setting involves increased levels of noise, activity and movement because there is an increased

emphasis on:

- interaction of staff in play activities
- sustained verbal interaction of staff with children
- increased language-specific activities
- increased use of dramatic intonation, facial expression and physical gesture as staff try to make meaning clear
- increased planned verbal interaction between staff as a specific strategy to accelerate children's understanding or speech production

This more intense verbal and physical dynamic is required in order to create an effective language immersion environment. However, it is important that children are facilitated in their ability to:

- listen carefully
- interpret non-verbal clues
- remember what they hear

A careful regard for room layout can provide quiet zones for those activities in which an adult presence and high levels of verbal interaction is necessary. Two separate rooms are ideal in an immersion situation. However a single room can be divided up using screens or shelving. The 'making things' table, where adult language use is high, can be adjacent to the painting area or sand tray, which tend not to generate a lot of noise. A storytelling area can be provided using a screen and a wall corner. Language games can take place at a remove from areas used for role play or large construction.

ACTIVITY



Make a diagram of the lay-out of your setting showing the activities which are being offered on a particular day. Indicate the position of adult-directed language activities and the adult responsible.

Supporting language learning through displays

Main points

It is important to create wall and table displays which offer opportunities to consolidate language learning and reflect the evolving language programme.

Display in an early years setting can contribute significantly to the quality of children's learning experiences. Its role is much greater than that of providing an attractive or exciting visual environment, although a visually attractive environment creates high levels of motivation in children, which in its turn enhances their ability to learn effectively. Display also provides opportunities to record and reflect the experiences and activities of children, current and recent. It provides a focus for discussion and recall of present and past events. It informs families about children's learning. It provides opportunities to draw children's attention to something new.



These latter areas are of particular importance in the immersion setting. As with the home language in the home language setting, the immersion language is interwoven through all areas of children's experiences in the setting. However the immersion setting also incorporates a highly systematic, planned exposure to identified priority vocabulary. This exposure is rolled out theme by theme, objective by objective, through a language programme which unfolds gradually throughout the course of children's attendance in the setting. Display in the language immersion setting should provide opportunities to reflect the changing emphasis of the language programme and act as a visual stimulus and reminder to children of that language.

As stated previously, concrete referents are crucial components in verbal interaction with children in the immersion language. Concrete referents support children in

understanding what is being said, and in remembering key items of language. Concrete referents are the actual items under discussion, or models, or pictures. Displays which involve records of activities in which children were involved, or work produced by children, or pictures or illustrations, all act as visual referents which support and consolidate children's experiences of language.

Displays can provide a focus for discussion – offering opportunities to staff for repetition and practice of key language items. A table or window-sill display offers children the opportunity to touch, smell and feel objects, which enhances their ability to remember the names of the objects. If displays involve children's work, their personal input and enjoyment of the process add greatly to their ability to remember and retain the language associated with the displays.

If displays relating to a particular language theme are retained beyond the life of that theme, they can also provide reminders of recent key language and continue to provide opportunities for practice and consolidation of that language. New displays can provide links with past language themes. This happens if displays contain elements which not only support language learning in current plans, but also provide opportunities to revisit, reiterate and maintain key language of past planning. It is important that displays also reflect and represent other developmental and experiential areas.

Displays should be visually attractive and add to the sense of colour and vibrancy within the setting. Displays can be presented:

- on walls, tables, windows
- hanging from the ceiling
- inside the setting itself
- outside in the family waiting area

Displays can be created entirely on the basis of staff input, or reflect the work of children or involve a combination of both staff and children. Simple text (lower case) may be added selectively to support families in developing familiarity with

some of the key language but text should not undermine visual clarity for children.

NOTE

Avoid clutter in individual displays.

Avoid an overall sense of clutter in the setting itself.

Suggestions about displays should take into account:

- key language in current focus
- key language of past planning
- other important developmental and experiential areas

Suggestions should not involve a protracted timescale to complete, nor be beyond the capabilities of staff, nor be beyond the display resources of the setting in terms of space or materials.

Display is not just something to look at. It should not be a wasted resource in the setting – its usefulness at an end when it is barely complete. Display should be viewed as an important aspect of the immersion language environment and dynamic. Children should be encouraged to look at displays and talk about them. Their attention should be drawn to particularly interesting or useful elements. Display should be used by staff to initiate discussion and conversation with children, to sing simple songs, to play simple games such as 'I spy'.

ACTIVITY



Take photographs of all the displays in your setting for the duration of three planned language themes. Date the point at which each display was put together. Discuss with staff how well displays reflect the changing focus in planned vocabulary exposure. Discuss the scope for general language development offered by displays.



Discuss any displays whose content drew on a variety of language objectives, past and present.

Creating resources to support language learning

Main points **It is important to create resources which support specific immersion language learning activities and objectives.**

There are some challenges around the area of language-specific resources in the language immersion setting. Most commercially-produced language resources do not adequately address the needs of an early years language immersion setting

This is understandable, given that commercial suppliers concentrate on home language settings, where home language competence is generally reasonably well established. They do not facilitate the structured approach to language planning which is needed in an immersion setting, where key language items are focused on progressively and systematically, unit by unit, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all areas of the children's basic language immersion needs.

Careful selection of materials and equipment will have ensured priority purchase of those resources which fulfil two functions. They offer scope for addressing developmental areas apart from immersion language development. They also incorporate scope for addressing key language items in the immersion language programme. Nevertheless, commercial purchases do not generally secure a comprehensive range of resources tailored to the needs of an immersion language programme. Creating resources within the setting is the most practical way of dealing with this shortcoming. It is not as daunting as it seems.

A picture library, reflecting the key vocabulary, is a basic component of simple resource-making within the setting. Ensuring conformity of size – A4, A5 or smaller – is important.

In this era of computer technology, illustrations are easily accessed, and enlarged, reduced or duplicated to accommodate a range of vocabulary and activities. Illustrations on light cardboard or cut to shape can be used with skittles, giant dice, in lotto and bingo games, in matching and sorting games, in fishing or hiding games, with games of music and movement. Collections of model items or actual-sized items can be used easily in 'pass the parcel', 'what's missing', 'I spy', or 'where is it hidden' games. Different accessories create different games and resources, addressing a wide range of themes, topics and specific language objectives.

ACTIVITY



A new member of staff has recently joined the team. She will be participating with a colleague in a game using one of the language-specific resources created within the setting. Explain the game – the number of children involved; and the nature of the activity. Explain the language purpose of the game, whether it supports the current theme or topic. Detail the specific language objectives of the game. Indicate, if appropriate, how it might be modified to address different language objectives relating to a different theme or topic.

In this section you have looked at how careful, reflective planning and organization of the physical environment of the setting can facilitate children's immersion language learning. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- selecting and providing resources which facilitate the planning and implementation of the language programme
- selecting and providing resources which facilitate the planning and implementation of a thematic approach to the language programme
- ensuring a broad range of concrete referents within resources to facilitate exposure to identified vocabulary

- ensuring that resources address the broad range of children's developmental needs
- recognising the role of illustrations in a storytelling book
- ensuring that physical lay-out within the setting facilitates staff ability to engage in sustained verbal interaction with children and children's ability to listen effectively
- recognizing how display consolidates language learning
- recognizing the need to create language specific resources within the setting

Unit 2

Section 3

Planning and implementing specific activities and experiences to promote children's immersion language learning

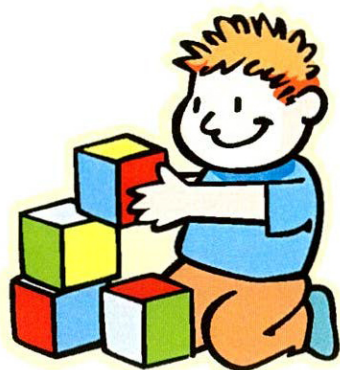
Successful planning for immersion language learning happens within the context of a language programme which has identified children's needs in terms of social and organizational language, common sentence patterns, fixed phrases and vocabulary.

High frequency vocabulary exposure is facilitated through a thematic approach to planning. This section looks at: detailed planning within themes, the linking of activities to language objectives, group learning, consultation with colleagues, the leader's role in modelling good communication techniques.

The role of play in planning for immersion language learning

Main points

It is important to recognize that play activities are the basis for children's immersion language learning.



Children's play has been the subject of many studies over the years, but its function is still a matter of debate. The term 'play' is used to cover a wide variety of activities, from the involuntary movements of the infant in the cot who kicks, grabs, gurgles and reaches, to the baby in the highchair who throws the rattle again and again to the floor, to the toddler who pulls everything out of the cupboard, to the 'pretending to be mammy' of the preschooler, to the rule-governed outdoor games of junior children in primary school.

There are a number of different theories of play:

- play as a means of using surplus energy
- play as relaxation
- play as practice in the skills for adult life
- play as a way of acting out fears and anxieties

All of these have some kernel of truth. The most influential theories have been those of Piaget, who believed that play contributes to and reflects the changing structures of the child's mental processes. No matter how theories vary, it is generally accepted that children, when given the opportunity to play, will do so and that the same patterns of play emerge consistently across differing cultures and societies:

- physical play
- creative play
- symbolic or pretend play
- construction play
- experimental or exploratory play
- games

Children in poorer societies may not have the range of play accessories which are available to children in richer societies, nor the same amount of leisure time. Children in less advanced societies cannot engage in new types of play which depend on technological innovation.

Educational models of play-related learning

During the twentieth century, due to the work of Piaget and early educational pioneers like Froebel, Montessori and Isaacs, play has become established as the central principle in the education of the young child in our society. All of them placed particular emphasis on the value of the child's inner motivation, discovery learning and the superior quality of a child's self-chosen activities. More recent work in the field of early learning by Vygotsky and Bruner have promoted a different model which not only confirms the role of the child as an active participant in learning, but also emphasizes the significance of the adult contribution. While there is a general consensus about the value of play in the learning and development of the child, the divergent strands within the philosophy of early years education regularly manifest themselves through the shifting emphasis that emerges in relation to:

- free play *vis-à-vis* structured play
- activity versus knowledge
- process versus product

- children learning or teachers teaching
- the role of the adult as observer and facilitator or as leader and organizer
- play as an activity in its own right, or play as a means to a learning objective decided by adults



The issue of what children's learning needs are, and who determines them, adds further complications to questions about educational models of play. Children's need to learn arises from a basic need to survive as biological and social animals within the environment in which they are born. The type of environment into which they are born creates differing learning needs, not only in relation to the physical reality of their environment but in relation to the values of the family, community or society into which they are born, and the expectations their family, community or society has of them as members. The personality, ability and experiences of the learner add a further dimension to the issue of what constitutes learning needs.

The early years setting provides an environment which addresses children's instinctive impulse to explore their environment, interact with others, imitate what others do, and develop the skills, knowledge and values base which helps them survive and flourish in the world they live in. The key vehicle for this process is play – on an individual and group basis, with and without adult involvement and participation.

The early years language immersion setting inserts a further dimension to the range of experience, skills, knowledge and values which must be addressed. The key vehicle for this process again is play-based activities – but with a more intense level of adult involvement and participation.

Providing a range of activities and experiences

Main points **It is important to provide opportunities for immersion language learning through a range of planned activities and experiences.**

Planning for quality provision in a language immersion setting requires careful consideration of two parallel processes – quality play and quality language exposure. Sometimes the planning emphasis is on one or the other, and sometimes the two are integrated.

Quality play provision, whether or not it involves specific language planning, has clear language spin-offs. The integration of language activities into all aspects of the life of the setting, the nature of routines and activities, the restricted language register, reflecting children's maturity and conceptual levels, and the emphasis on sustained verbal interaction with children, all ensure that children receive high levels of exposure to a core of common sentence patterns and grammatical structures automatically, without conscious planning on the part of staff. Children also become familiar with the sentence patterns, phrases and vocabulary of social and organizational language.

High quality play provision arises from a planned play environment which:

- is structured
- provides a balance and range of play opportunities
- involves active participation by the children
- addresses all developmental areas
- emphasizes enjoyment
- stimulates high levels of motivation
- offers variety and progression
- offers choice
- addresses varying levels of maturity, ability and

experience

- develops confidence and self esteem
- recognizes the value of the adult role.

The role of adults

Adult involvement in the play activities of children has a significant impact on the quality of play. Without adult support, children may choose their activities at random, activities chosen may not match experiential or ability levels, and play can become repetitive or aimless, keeping children occupied as opposed to adding to their development. Judicious adult support can contribute significantly to the enhancement of children's play and learning.

The role of adults in a language immersion setting is more proactive than that of their counterparts in a home language setting. Nevertheless while the adult in the immersion setting has a major role in maximizing verbal interaction with children, the adult must also know when to adopt a more discreet presence in the activities of children, and, indeed, when to withdraw completely.

Systematic exposure to, consolidation of, and progression in immersion language vocabulary is carried through a thematic or topical approach to language learning. This involves:

- ordering of themes or topics into a coherent sequence, taking account of natural links
- identifying priority vocabulary within each theme or topic
- planning the activities of any day or number of days with specific vocabulary in mind
- identifying stories, songs, rhymes, and games which offer opportunities to use this vocabulary
- planning opportunities where children can produce the concrete referents which reflect the vocabulary focus
- identifying how other play activities might be modified or accessorized to support use of this vocabulary



The approach outlined here with regard to planning for quality play and quality language exposure could be described as a twin-track approach – two parallel lines with frequent interconnecting junctions. The first track concentrates largely

on the quality of the play provision – physical, creative or construction play, symbolic or pretend play, experimental or exploratory play. Effective play provision involves a broad range of activities, variety and progression within activities. Adults contribute to this process not only through enhancing the quality of play but also through use of the immersion language. As a natural by-product of this process, therefore, children are exposed to a considerable range of sentence patterns, phrases, vocabulary and grammatical complexity, within the parameters of their ongoing experiences and conceptual maturity.

The second track concentrates on immersion language exposure in the context of identified vocabulary. It involves the planning of play-based activities whose main purpose is to provide exposure to vocabulary which has been identified as relevant or important to the needs, wants and interests of the children. These activities will have frequent cross-over to or overlap with the first track.

Play-based activities with a specific immersion language focus must also incorporate opportunities to address other developmental or play areas. A 'food' theme provides many opportunities for exploratory and experimental play where children use touch, taste and smell, and have opportunities to engage in activities such as cooking and growing seeds. Activities whose main focus is another developmental or play area may sometimes have a central role in providing exposure to an identified vocabulary area. Physical play, for example, has a significant contributory role in exposure to vocabulary within a 'body' theme. Constructive play may offer important exposure to vocabulary within a 'transport' theme.

ACTIVITY



Describe the activities that were offered in your setting during the course of a single day to address

- *physical play*
- *creative play*

- *symbolic or pretend play*
- *construction play*
- *experimental or exploratory play*

Indicate which of the above activities, if any, offered opportunities to support specific language objectives within the current language plan. Indicate which of the above activities involved an adult presence. Explain the adults' role.



Describe additional play-based activities, with a high adult input, which carried specific language objectives from within the current language plan.

Spontaneous opportunities for immersion language learning

Main points

It is important that planning is sufficiently flexible to take advantage of spontaneous opportunities for immersion language learning.



The foundation of successful language immersion early years provision is an environment which is planned and structured to ensure provision for play and language both. However this does not imply a rigid or inflexible approach. Nor does it imply a resistance to any unplanned or spontaneous opportunities for immersion language learning which may arise. An unexpected event inside the setting or in the experiences of children outside the setting, or an unexpected direction in how a play or language activity develops, can give rise to opportunities to enhance language exposure outside of a current plan.

An essential element in successful language learning is relevance to the interest and activities of the learners. Planning for language exposure in the context of play-based activities ensures relevance to the interests and activities of young children. However, spontaneous opportunities which

arise in the setting, and are relevant to the children, should be grasped.

Spontaneous opportunities can help consolidate or practice language which is already within the children's experience. They can also provide initial familiarity with planned future exposure. Spontaneous opportunities can also give rise to a fast-forwarding of language areas, themes or topics planned for a later date. For example, an unexpected fall of snow may give rise to a 'weather' topic, involving activities which incorporate the vocabulary of 'hot' 'wet', 'cold', 'dry' or 'clothes' scheduled for a later date.

ACTIVITY



Give an example from your experience where a spontaneous opportunity for language development arose outside of the plan.

Explain how it arose, and the direction you went with it.

Explain how the children benefited.

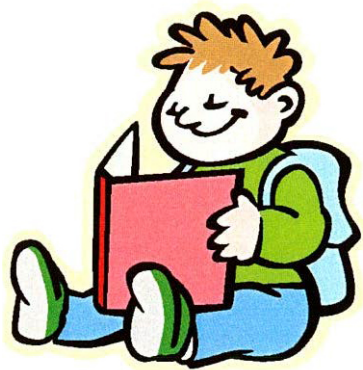
Day to day planning

Main points

It is important to plan the activities of any day or number of days around clear language objectives.

The development of a thematic or topical approach to vocabulary exposure in the immersion language ensures a systematic progression in relation to this area of language throughout the course of the children's attendance in the setting. The identification of priority vocabulary within each theme or topic supports the process through which children are given opportunities to become familiar with vocabulary which is of greatest benefit or importance to them, and to begin to remember it. It is better for children to engage with a small number of words which are absolutely necessary than to engage with a large number of words of less importance. However within this hierarchy of importance, further gradation

is needed. This involves identifying vocabulary which will act as a focus for staff language usage over a particular day or a set period of days. The period of time allocated to the vocabulary identified, or the number of vocabulary items identified depends on a number of things. Decisions made about the rate of planned vocabulary exposure may be influenced by any one or a combination of the following factors:



- the children's overall exposure to the immersion language to date -
 - the greater the language exposure, the greater the overall familiarity with the immersion language, and the easier it becomes to access further language areas
- links between the vocabulary of the current theme or topic and vocabulary of previous themes -
 - an 'animals' theme may have already provided some familiarity with body parts,
 - a 'body' theme may have already provided some familiarity with vocabulary of movement
- the conceptual complexity of the vocabulary in question -
 - naming vocabulary associated with common animals is more easily accessed than describing words of size
- the linguistic complexity of the vocabulary –
 - short words are easier than long words
- the phonetic complexity of the vocabulary –
 - some words are harder to say than others
- similarities with the home language –
 - similar sounding words which mean the same thing in home and immersion language are easy to access,
 - similar sounding words which mean different things in the home and immersion languages may cause initial confusion

ACTIVITY



Keep a log for the duration of the first planned language theme or topic in your setting. Detail the planned vocabulary exposure on a daily basis.



Keep a log for the duration of a planned language theme or topic at a mid-way point during children's attendance in your setting. Detail the planned vocabulary exposure on a daily basis.



Keep a log for the duration of a planned language theme or topic at a late point during children's attendance in your setting. Detail the planned vocabulary exposure on a daily basis.

NOTE

It is important that the initial settling-in period in the setting is completed before systematic, planned exposure to vocabulary is properly commenced.

Main points

Reiteration of language objectives across a range of activities and experiences

It is important to ensure that language learning objectives are common to a range of concurrent activities and experiences.

Planning for the reiteration of planned vocabulary exposure across a range of concurrent activities ensures that:

- efforts of all staff are concentrated more efficiently
- vocabulary exposure is intensified
- the variety of activities and experiences promotes a variety of experiential contexts
- vocabulary exposure is embedded within a substantial range of immersion language usage

The following example indicates activities which allow frequent opportunities to focus on the word '**madadh**' 'dog'. The following might be provided over the period of a day or several days.

Equipment

Any equipment involving a dog will be put out:

- jigsaws, matching cards, lotto
- sorting materials
- templates and moulds
- farm animals

Some of this equipment will be used on its own. Some will be used in conjunction with other equipment to extend the language possibilities of that equipment, for example:

- dog moulds and templates with printing/painting,
- dog moulds and templates with clay, dough or sand,
- farm animals or dog with sand,
- farm animals or dog with construction materials,
- dog in house corner

Games

- Animal shapes (plastic, cards, outline drawing), the majority of which are dogs, are placed on a table or the floor. Children move around in time to music. When the music stops, children, on the teacher's direction, lift a dog or lift any other animal
- Sticking a tail/nose/mouth/teeth on a dog. Children are blindfolded and in turns try to place a body part on the appropriate place
- Matching or snap cards. Using cards, children match different coloured dogs, or different types of dogs

Storytelling

- A story involving a dog character will be told

Making concrete referents

Children

- colour in a pre-drawn dog outline,
- fill in a pre-drawn dog outline using tissue, wool or other materials
- glue on missing parts of a dog: nose, ear, mouth, tail, etc.
- glue on a bone/bowl beside a dog shape
- make dog mobiles (using pre-cut shapes)
- make a dog frieze (using pre-cut shapes)
- make a dog with junk material



Songs and Rhymes

1. (To the tune of 'Here we go Round the Mulberry Bush')

Seo an madadh, wuf, wuf, wuf.	Here's the dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.
Seo an madadh, wuf, wuf, wuf.	Here's the dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.
Seo an madadh, wuf, wuf, wuf.	Here's the dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.
Seo an madadh, wuf, wuf, wuf.	Here's the dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.
Seo an madadh, wuf, wuf, wuf.	Here's the dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.

2. (To the tune of 'Lost my darling')

Tá madadh ag Áine, wuf, wuf, wuf.	Áine has a dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.
Tá madadh ag Áine, wuf, Wuf, wuf.	Áine has a dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.
Tá madadh ag Áine, wuf, Wuf, wuf.	Áine has a dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.
Tá madadh ag Áine, wuf, Wuf, wuf.	Áine has a dog, wuf, wuf, wuf.

3. (To the tune of 'For he's a Jolly Good Fellow')

Tá madadh déanta ag Deirdre.	Deirdre's made a dog.
Tá madadh déanta ag Deirdre.	Deirdre's made a dog.
Tá madadh déanta ag Deirdre.	Deirdre's made a dog.
Tá madadh déanta ag Deirdre.	Deirdre's made a dog.
Wuf wuf, wuf wuf, wuf wuf.	Wuf wuf, wuf wuf, wuf wuf

ACTIVITY



Describe a language activity in which you were involved today.

Detail the language objectives which you were focusing on during this activity. Had these language objectives been identified as part of the current plan? Did this activity form part of the plan?



Describe your involvement in any other activities designed to reinforce the same language objectives. Were other staff involved

in activities promoting these same language objectives? Describe these activities, and your colleagues' role. Were all children exposed to these language objectives at some stage during the session?

Natural language usage

Main points

It is important to ensure that planned activities and experiences provide frequent opportunities to engage with language objectives in the context of natural language exposure.



It is important to remember that reiterated focus on one word or a narrow range of words does not mean that staff communicate in single words and pointing gestures. While sentences are simple, and specific words are repeated again and again, natural speech is used. During the recently described activities, situations have been created in which the word '**madadh**' 'dog' can be used appropriately and naturally on very many different occasions throughout the session. Throughout the activities, adults play with children or engage with them, talking, describing, commenting, asking questions, focusing again and again on '**madadh**' 'dog', using a variety of other words and sentence patterns, and employing gesture, facial expression and tone of voice to full effect.

For example, playing alongside children in an activity using dough, working with moulds or shaping a dog with her hands, an adult might say the following:

Amharc anseo. Amharc an rud atá mise a dhéanamh. Seo madadh. Rinne mé madadh. Tá cluasa aige. Tá súile aige. Tá ruball aige. Nach deas an madadh seo? Amharc. Tá sé ina sheasamh. Tá an madadh ina sheasamh. Tá sé ag rith. Tá an madadh ag rith. Rith, rith, wuf, wuf. Tá an madadh ag rith. An bhfuil madadh agatsa, a Áine? An bhfuil madadh agatsa, a Chiaráin? Seo, tá madadh déanta ag Áine. Tá madadh déanta ag Ciarán.	Look here. Look at what I'm doing. Here's a dog. I made a dog. He has ears. He has eyes. He has a tail. Isn't this dog nice? Look. He's standing up. The dog is standing up. He is running. The dog is running. Run, run, wuf, wuf. The dog is running. Do you have a dog, Áine? Do you have a dog, Chiarán? Áine has made a dog. Ciarán has made a dog.
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ACTIVITY



Use a planning session to discuss and rote play a sustained flow of immersion language usage. Refer to a number of activities which involve a specific focus on identified key vocabulary.

Taking account of differing rates of progression in immersion language learning

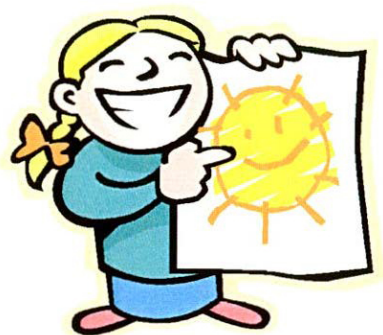
Main points

It is important to provide opportunities to work with children on the basis of a common level of immersion language competence.

Language learning activities in the early years immersion setting can be described as taking place in either **open language** or **intensive language** situations. Both situations have characteristics in common. However there are also differences between them.

The open language situation

The open language situation is not planned in the strict sense of the word. It arises as part of the overall planning strategy of bombarding children with the immersion language. It arises within the context of the daily organizational routines in the setting. It arises within the context of general conversation with children. It arises within the context of play activities where the quality of play has been the central focus of the planning. It arises within the context of unplanned or spontaneous events or activities.



Characteristics of the open language situation

- may be initiated by staff or children
- can involve individual children or a random group
- participation by children is voluntary
- staff use relaxed, unhurried style

Language learning activities on an open basis are useful strategies for developing and consolidating general language skills.

Language learning activities on an open basis frequently involve random groups. As a result, it is irregular in terms of the amount of exposure any one child receives over a period of time or how well tailored that exposure is to individual language needs. To be effective, the teacher must have a firm grasp of the overall language programme, and be mindful of current and recent language objectives.

The intensive language situation

The intensive language situation is an attempt to ensure consistent, regular language exposure in progressive, measurable, bite-sized amounts.

Characteristics of the intensive language situation

- is initiated by staff
- is underpinned by specific language objectives
- involves specific activities in the daily routine
- can involve the whole class

- can involve small groups
- can involve small groups chosen on the basis of their common language competence
- sometimes involves individual children
- participation of children is expected and accepted by them
- staff use a more definite style and pace

Language learning activities on an intensive basis can be directed at whole class groups or smaller units within the class group. Where they are directed at a whole class group, the adult is dealing with a wide spectrum of ability and language levels. While perhaps focusing on specific aspects of language, she must also pitch the general language at a level where all children are receiving sufficient comprehensible input to maintain enthusiasm and interest. At the same time, she must allow scope for language consolidation at one end of the learning spectrum and language enrichment at the other. The size of the group and the complexity of the language situation can make this a difficult situation to handle effectively.

Smaller groups with varying levels of immersion language competence are less of a challenge. It is also important to remember that children with more developed immersion language skills are useful models for other children in a mixed group.

If the intensive language situation is directed at smaller units, where children are grouped on the basis of common language competence, it is possible to provide language which is pitched to more specific individual needs, or more finely tuned to differing levels of language competence. This situation is relatively easy to handle, and children's progression is more easily monitored and supported. The grouping of children on the basis of common language competence is an important component in the effective early years immersion setting. It should take place on a regular basis, even daily. It is more beneficial if the group can be removed from the main body of the room. Activities with these groups should last a minimum of 5-10 minutes. The

length of time depends on the nature of the activity, the size of the group and overall skills of listening and concentration.

ACTIVITY



Keep a log detailing appropriate information with regard to intensive language activities which involve specific language objectives. Under each group category, indicate the staff member responsible and details of the activity.

	whole class	small group mixed language competence	small group common language competence	individuals
storytelling				
games				
songs / rhymes				
other				

ACTIVITY



In the context of staff discussion, group children on the basis of common immersion language competence. Do not forget that the listening and concentration skills of individual children will impact on group work. Make sure that staff are familiar with group compositions, not only to facilitate intensive language activity on the basis of common language competence, but to facilitate the inclusion of useful immersion language peer models in groups where the language competence is mixed.

Staff input to planning

Main points

It is important to consult with colleagues in planning and take their skills into account.

The ability of staff to work as a team contributes significantly to the quality of provision within an early years language immersion setting. The sharing of responsibilities in the practical day-to-day organization and implementation of routines and activities to promote the smooth and efficient running of the setting, is fundamental to all early years settings and requires high levels of co-operation amongst all members of staff.

In a language immersion setting, verbal interaction between staff as a planned strategy to promote language immersion development is an essential component in the daily activities of the setting. Team-work, as an integral part of activities like story-telling, puppets, movement and games, where staff act as foils for one another in eliciting and guiding responses from the children and encouraging participation, is another essential component. This requires very close working relationships between all members of staff. Indeed it is important that staff not only work together well, but that they feel relaxed, comfortable and confident in one another's company.

This level of assurance may arise naturally. People who enjoy working with children, who have friendly, outgoing personalities, have many characteristics which contribute to open working relationships with adults. However, conscious effort is needed to nurture these characteristics and develop their full potential for the benefit of children, parents and staff alike. The team leader has an important role in this process, not only in terms of exemplifying good practice in day-to-day relationships with staff, but in terms of overall style of leadership. A good team leader is able to help create:



- a shared vision
- a common sense of purpose
- a shared understanding of issues and challenges

and help provide:

- coherent direction and action

This process is facilitated by a context which:

- provides regular opportunities for genuine discussion
- builds positively on contributions from staff
- provides practical support for the build-up of staff expertise.

In particular, staff need to be involved in the planning process, and should have opportunities to contribute to the:

- content of the language programme
- thematic framework for planned language exposure
- identification of key vocabulary
- identification of language objectives
- planning of activities and experiences

A good team leader:

- builds positively on staff contribution at planning level
- deploys staff effectively
- provides practical support for the build-up of staff expertise
- provides positive feed-back and affirmation to staff in carrying out their roles

ACTIVITY



Retain minutes of staff planning sessions. Include information on:

planning focus

issues arising

contributions made by staff

decisions made

Ensure you include records of dates, the number of staff present and the length of the meeting.



You have a member of staff who lacks confidence in her immersion language competence. Her competence is, however, at an acceptable level. What responsibilities will you ask her to carry out with children during the course of a day's planned activities? Give your reasons.



Do the same members of staff take regular responsibility for whole group story-telling or working with groups on the basis of their common language competence, or do responsibilities vary? Give reasons for the current practice, making reference to how effectively it supports children's language learning needs.

Demonstrating good practice in exemplifying communication techniques of repetition, restatement and expansion

Main points

It is important to model the use of repetition, restatement and expansion techniques to support colleagues' practice.

Quality immersion language learning depends on a number of interrelated factors, including:

- appropriate detail in the content of the overall language programme
- the application of a variety of language exposure strategies to the discrete components of the language programme
- the quality of the language learning activities and experiences

The cornerstone of quality immersion language learning, however, is the quality of immersion language input from staff. Quality immersion language input involves high levels of sustained verbal interaction with children:



- characterized by significant repetition, restatement and expansion
- supported by a range of contextual, visual and auditory clues to support meaning
- in the context of identified language areas

Maintaining a fluent, confident flow of immersion language with children, providing opportunities to familiarize children with new language while building on and consolidating past language experiences, incorporating consistent repetition in key language areas, are fundamental and crucial staff activities.

As has been already described, the range of sentence patterns which arise within the context of the activities and experiences of young children in an early years setting, while varied, is narrow in comparison to those appropriate to the needs and conceptual levels of older learners. The restricted range guarantees substantial repetition. The regularity of routines and activities ensures that the core vocabulary and phrases associated with them can be used often by staff. However, effective teaching still requires that priority vocabulary be identified, organised into units, and that activities are planned to allow intensive exposure to the vocabulary through repetition.

In addition, there are a number of techniques of communication which increase significantly the degree of exposure possible in these areas. They can be described as:

- sequential repetition
- restatement
- expansion

These techniques mimic distinctive characteristics of motherese or caretakerese, terms used to describe a language register which has been identified as being a significant contributory factor in successful home language development.

Sequential repetition involves the repetition of a word, phrase or sentence several times, one after the other -

Oh look, look.

Here's a horse.

Look, here's a horse.

Here's a big horse.

Here's a big horse coming over to see us.

Sequential repetition involves heightened facial and vocal expression, with variations of intonation, and particular emphasis on key words. Sequential repetition usually emerges in speech initiated by the adult in situations where the child has little or no speech.

Restatement and expansion emerge in response to something said by someone else. Restatement involves repeating something that has already been said, using a different formulation or reforming it as a question. Restatement is a feature of both caretakerese and adult dialogue, although it performs a different function in each.

Adult dialogue		Mother and child dialogue	
Adult 1 ⇒	I'd like a piece of toast.	Child ⇒	Ball.
Adult 2 ⇒	Oh, you'd like a piece of toast.	Mother ⇒	Oh, you want the ball.

Restatement is a way of confirming what you believe you have heard or what you think the speaker intended. Expansion involves adding to the content of what has already been said. Expansion is a feature of both caretakerese and adult dialogue, although it also performs a different function in each.

Adult dialogue		Mother and child dialogue	
Adult 1 ⇒	I'd like a piece of toast	Child ⇒	Ball.
Adult 2 ⇒	Oh, you'd like a piece of toast – with jam on it?	Mother ⇒	Oh, you want the ball – the big red ball

In early home language learning, sequential repetition provides repeated models of relevant sentences. Restatement and expansion offer back to the baby completed language versions or extended language versions of the mother's interpretation of the baby's intention. She completes the baby's abbreviated attempt at language production, saying the words that the baby has been unable to say, saying the words the baby has omitted.



The team leader has an important role in demonstrating good practice in relation to techniques of language repetition. Some form of language repetition pervades most instances of verbal interaction with children as they play. Language repetition is an important element on occasions where staff initiate dialogue with one another for the purposes of involving children in listening to, responding to or speaking the immersion language.

The team leader must assume a prominent role in exemplifying the techniques of sequential repetition, restatement or expansion. She must recognize the overriding importance of sustained language input from staff in progressing immersion language learning. She must be mindful of how she speaks to children during the normal course of the day's events, practicing, consolidating and extending those aspects of language, general and specific, which are part of the language programme. She must steer activities and language to provide further opportunities to reiterate vocabulary, phrases and sentence patterns in ways which are relevant and natural. She must be prepared to show the way in initiating staged dialogue with colleagues. She must take a lead role in specific language activities which depend on verbal teamwork for success. She must be prepared to consciously model these techniques at her own suggestion or a colleagues request.

ACTIVITY



Use a staff planning session to discuss the techniques of sequential repetition, restatement and expansion. Discuss

examples of, or opportunities for, good practice in recent activities.



Practice or rehearse verbal teamwork for an anticipated activity, ensuring that you incorporate sequential repetition, restatement and expansion as appropriate.

Ensuring the positive participation of children in immersion language activities

Main points

It is important that children's interest, participation and enjoyment are maintained in all language activities.

Whether planning for quality play provision or planning for quality language provision, the interest, participation and enjoyment of children must be maintained. The interest and enjoyment of learner are essential factors in successful learning. A play-based curriculum is the bedrock of children's early learning. A play-based curriculum ensures high-levels of children's interest and enjoyment. It offers substantial opportunities for children to participate in practical hands-on activities. It provides many opportunities for children to participate in social engagement with others. It allows children to participate on their own terms with activities, peers and adults in the context of their own levels of development, personality and learning characteristics.

Adults have an important role in enhancing the play activities of children. As the sole source of language immersion exposure, they have the major role in developing and promoting children's immersion language competence. They develop this competence through open language and intensive language activities. Both types of activities, open and intensive, involve high levels of verbal interaction with children. However, the main strategy for planned exposure to

vocabulary is intensive language activities. These intensive language activities involve a more directive adult presence. Children's participation is essential. Intensive language activities happen on a regular basis. These activities in particular therefore must ensure a high level of interest and enjoyment. Children must be strongly motivated to participate.

ACTIVITY



Observe children's positive participation in immersion language activities where an adult has an important or sustained role. Note any activities where there is a generalised reluctance of children to participate. Note any children who indicate an established reluctance to participate. Is this true for all adult directed activities or is it a more generalized reluctance? Discuss your observations at a staff planning session. Implement agreed solutions and monitor results.

In this section you have looked at detailed planning for immersion language learning. When you have completed this section, you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- the integration of immersion language learning with play
- a structured approach in providing quality play and quality immersion language experiences
- breadth and variety in immersion language experiences
- the role of adults in ensuring quality play and effective immersion language learning
- open language activities
- intensive language activities
- linking activities with language learning objectives
- reiteration of common language objectives across a range of activities and experiences
- exemplifying techniques of repetition, restatement and expansion
- flexibility in addressing spontaneous opportunities for

language learning

- grouping children on the basis of common language competence
- consulting with colleagues
- using staff skills effectively

Unit 2

Section 4

Monitoring and evaluating activities and experiences to promote children's immersion language learning



The quality and effectiveness of the immersion language learning environment offered to the children benefits from regular, considered reflection. This involves ensuring that there are opportunities to explore the various features that make up the language environment of the setting, to observe children's progress, and to analyse the quality of their experiences and activities. This section looks at strategies for improving and enhancing children's immersion language learning through the processes of monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation

Main points

It is important to recognize the role of monitoring and evaluation in contributing to a culture of improvement in your setting.

The complementary processes of monitoring and evaluation are important to the provision of a quality learning environment for young children. Monitoring involves collecting information about the learning environment. Evaluation involves making judgements about the learning environment, on the basis of information gathered. The process of monitoring and evaluation is as much about identifying and celebrating good practice as it is about formulating and implementing proposals for improvement.

Individualized monitoring and evaluation

Reflective practitioners monitor and evaluate constantly throughout the course of their interaction with children. They take mental note of the children's engagement with and interest in the activity, their responses to the activity, and

remain alert to a possible mismatch between the activity and children's ability and experiential levels. They reach conclusions and make decisions about the appropriateness or relevance of the activity, or aspects of it, as the activity is ongoing. They may make adjustments in the scope and pace of the activity, and their own contribution, in order to tailor the activity more specifically to the needs of children at that moment. Reflective practitioners may sometimes record a written comment on an activity as a reminder for future activities or in relation to the needs or reactions of children, either as a group or individually.

A team approach

Monitoring and evaluation carried out by individual members of staff, in relation to activities in which they are involved directly, may provide them with insights which contribute to their personal understanding and awareness. They can then feed what they have learned into their own practice. However, a more formal, structured and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation, based on a whole staff or team approach, is a more reliable device for:

- gathering information which will lead to enduring improvement in the overall quality of provision within the setting as a whole
- gathering information which will lead to consistent quality of provision within the setting
- promoting professional dialogue as the basis for the sharing and dissemination of good practice

If monitoring and evaluation are to be carried out successfully, a number of factors need to be in place:

- it must be manageable
- it must be part of a recurring cycle of monitoring and evaluation
- each cycle must have a clear focus
- the focus must be relevant to the setting's priorities



Gathering information

Staff are frequently uncomfortable with the process of monitoring and evaluation. There can be an inspectorial or inquisitorial edge to it which staff find threatening. An early years setting usually involves a small unit with a degree of intimacy among staff which is not possible in a larger organization. While the leader carries the main responsibility for motivating and managing the process of monitoring and evaluation, a shared, agreed approach is essential. Benefits to staff should be emphasised – their enhanced skills, capability and effectiveness. Emphasis should be put on how the process will benefit staff, on how their skills, understanding and effectiveness will be enhanced. An acknowledgement by the leader that **all** staff aspire to improve their practice and that **all** staff can learn from one another is useful. While honest and open dialogue is important, there is no place for judgemental remarks. Comments on what is observed and noted should be descriptive and should support staff to build positively on their strengths. Information on which to base evaluative judgements about the quality of provision can be gathered in a number of ways, including:

- informal discussion and observation
- reviewing written documentation
- focused discussion at staff meetings
- focused discussion with individual members of staff
- discussion with parents.

Sometimes the only way of gathering information is through observation of staff activities. Again, in an early years setting, where staff are used to working in close proximity and co-operation with one another, staff observation of one another is a natural, ongoing aspect of the everyday life of the setting.

ACTIVITY



Use a staff meeting to have an initial discussion about monitoring and evaluation. Explain its purpose. Emphasize the participative nature of the process and the advantages to children and staff both. Ensure that all staff have an opportunity to offer their opinions and share any anxieties.

Monitoring and evaluating the quality of planned language activities

Main points **It is important to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of planned language activities and experiences.**

The foundation of successful language immersion early years provision is a planned, structured environment – planned and structured in terms of play and immersion language both. A twin-track approach to this has already been advocated. The first track plans for the broad range of children’s play and developmental needs and incorporates opportunities for general immersion language exposure. The second track plans for intensive exposure to identified vocabulary within the context of a cycle of themes or topics. These are not mutually exclusive tracks. There is frequent overlap between them. Activities with a specific immersion language focus or objective will also provide scope for development in non-language areas. Play activities which are not primarily focused on language development can, at the same time, accommodate a high level of natural exposure to some areas of specific vocabulary.

Monitoring and evaluation are important tools for reflecting on the quality of activities whose main function is immersion language development. They are particularly appropriate for a critical exploration of activities which incorporate planned exposure to identified vocabulary through themes and topics. However, activities whose main function is the promotion of other developmental areas, where language exposure is less specific and more generalized, also benefit from periodic reflective attention.

Various aspects of language learning activities can be monitored and evaluated. Depending on the focus, different

information may be gathered. The planning and implementation stages are useful areas for consideration.



Monitoring and evaluating short-term planning

A look at short-term planning throughout the duration of a number of planning units might stimulate questions such as these:

- Do the plans indicate where on the continuum between comprehension and speech production the emphasis lies?
- Are the specific immersion language objectives within each planning unit clearly articulated?
- Are there a number of activities within each planning unit which provide exposure to the same specific language objectives?
- How is exposure to specific language objectives ensured for all children?
- Do plans indicate how other non-language specific activities support exposure to the specific language objectives of the planning unit?
- Do plans indicate activities which provide scope for non-specific generalized language exposure?
- Is there variety of activity within each planning unit, both language specific and non-language specific?
- Are there opportunities for children to make choices?
- Is there variety in how children are organized?
- Are there opportunities in each plan for group work with children of differing immersion language competence?
- Are there opportunities in each plan for group work with children on the basis of a common immersion language competence?
- Are there opportunities over a number of plans for work with individual children?
- Are opportunities for group verbalization flagged up?
- Are opportunities for prompted speech flagged up?
- Are staff roles explicit?
- Is there variety in staff roles over a number of planning units?
- What aspect of planning was most beneficial?
- How could planning be improved?

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of planned language activities

There is sometimes a mismatch between what is planned and what actually happens. Plans are too ambitious. Some activities last longer than anticipated. An unexpected event occurs. There is an untimely interruption. A useful opportunity to promote language development outside of the plan arises. There is sometimes a mismatch between the expected outcomes of an activity and the reality. A planned activity is too difficult or too easy. Children are unable to maintain concentration or interest. Opportunities for high frequency usage of specific language items are irrelevant or too contrived. A consistent or regular pattern of major mismatch between planning and implementation raises important questions about the quality of planning or the understanding that staff have of the relationship between planning and what they do.

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of planned language activities might stimulate the following questions:

- Were all planned language specific activities carried out?
If not, why not?
- Were all children involved in at least one of the planned language activities?
- Were the planned language activities successful?
- Did children enjoy them?
- Did children appear engaged?
- Was children's interest maintained?
- Were the activities relevant to children's experiential or ability levels?
- Were the activities appropriate to children's immersion language levels?
- Were opportunities to ensure exposure to language objectives substantial, adequate or poor, and did staff avail of them?
- Did opportunities exist to provide exposure to language objectives of past planning, or to develop initial familiarity with the language objectives of future planning and did staff avail of them?

- Were staff comfortable with their roles?
- Were staff comfortable with the timing and pacing of activities in which they were involved?
- Did resources support the activities?
- What aspect of implementation went particularly well?
- What changes might improve implementation?

NOTE

Monitoring and evaluation examples have been directed at the broad sweep of planning and implementation. However, it is possible to concentrate one's focus on a more narrowly defined aspect within each of these areas. Monitoring and evaluation can also be carried out in relation to other key areas, such as: the link between displays and immersion language objectives; effective use of time; individual, regularly occurring planned language activities such as storytelling or singing.

ACTIVITY



Describe a recent monitoring and evaluation process carried out in your setting in relation to the quality of planned language activities. What was the focus? Who was involved? How was information gathered? How long did the process last? When was it discussed? What opinions did the staff form about quality in this area of provision – strengths and weaknesses? What action is the setting taking to address areas where a need for improvement has been identified?

Quality and frequency of immersion language usage with children

Main points **It is important to monitor and evaluate the frequency and quality of immersion language interaction with children.**

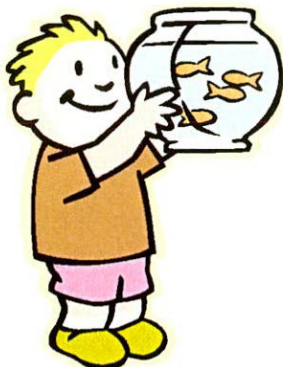
Planning within a clear, coherent structure is the foundation of successful language immersion early years provision. However the single predominating factor which promotes or undermines successful immersion language learning is the amount of immersion language children hear and the quality and nature of the immersion language they hear.

Language pervades every aspect of activities within an early years setting – greeting and farewell, addressing children’s physical and emotional needs, addressing behaviour, comforting a distressed child, resolving conflict, praising achievement, organizing transition between activities, organizing children’s movements about the room, interacting with children in their play.

Many of these activities provide automatic exposure to aspects of the immersion language. Some activities must be specifically planned in order to ensure exposure to other aspects of the immersion language. Whether automatic or planned language exposure is involved, staff have a choice in terms of:

- the frequency with which they speak to children
- the amount of language they use on any one occasion
- the words, phrases and sentence patterns they incorporate into their language use
- the emphasis they give to particular elements of language
- their use of repetition, restatement and expansion
- their use of non-language clues to support children’s understanding

- the vocal clarity with which they enunciate the immersion language



The quality and frequency of staff verbal interaction with children in the immersion language is a crucial area for a setting's internal monitoring and evaluation processes. During this process, it is important to look at individual staff contribution to the vigour and richness of the children's immersion language environment as well as the overall contribution that staff make as a team.

Monitoring and evaluation of this key area might stimulate the following questions:

- How frequently do staff speak to children in the immersion language?
- When staff speak to children is there a sustained, confident flow of language?
- Do staff enunciate the immersion language clearly?
- Is staff use of the immersion language accurate?
- Do staff use simple language patterns?
- Do staff demonstrate variety in their use of simple language patterns?
- Do staff implement the 'here and now' principle, talking about on-going events or things that children can see, hear, touch, feel or smell?
- Do staff demonstrate facial and vocal expression?
- Do staff use body language effectively?
- Do staff use opportunities to emphasize key words and phrases which reflect the current language plan?
- Do staff use opportunities to use key words and phrases of past language planning?
- Do staff use sequential repetition, restatement and expansion in their verbal interactions with children?
- Do staff listen and respond to what children say?

ACTIVITY



Describe a recent monitoring and evaluation process carried out in your setting in relation to the frequency of verbal interaction with children. Who was involved? How was information gathered? How long did the process last? When was it discussed? What opinions did staff form about quality in this area of provision – strengths and weaknesses? What action is the setting taking to address areas where improvement is needed?

Quality and frequency of collaborative dialogue among staff

Main points

It is important to monitor and evaluate the quality and frequency of planned or intentional verbal interaction between colleagues.

Verbal interaction between staff as they co-operate with one another in the organization of the day's routines and activities provides a constant discreet backdrop to the main verbal interaction taking place between children and staff. However, the incorporation of intentional or planned dialogue between staff is a significant strategy for increasing the amount of immersion language usage children hear. It provides opportunities, through increased repetition, to focus children's attention more acutely on relevant aspects of language. It also allows staff, through modelled actions, to accelerate children's understanding. It allows staff, through modelled verbalization, to encourage children's productive skills. Monitoring and evaluation of this aspect of the settings provision might raise the following questions or issues for discussion:

- Is intentional dialogue between staff a recognizable

characteristic of your setting?

- In which circumstances does it most frequently occur?
 - as a spontaneous add-on
 - as a planned strategy in the following activities
 - storytelling
 - games
 - puppets
- Do staff feel comfortable in initiating or contributing to this type of dialogue?
- Do staff feel that it is a useful device for increasing exposure to key language items, accelerating children's understanding, or accelerating children's speech production?

ACTIVITY



Look at the quality of a planned verbal interaction between staff in a storytelling session. What was the story? Was the purpose of the planned verbal interaction to increase exposure, facilitate comprehension, support production? Was it successful? How could it be improved?

Assessment

Main points

It is important to assess children's progress in immersion language development through observation and verbal interaction.

Assessment of children's progress is an integral part of the process of providing appropriate learning experiences. Assessment in an early years setting is largely informal. Daily contact with children, participating with them in their play, observing them as they play with others or alone, and talking to them, gives staff valuable insights into how they are learning and how their learning may be supported or extended. Information gathered through observation or

interaction with children, and decisions arising from this information are based on staff experience of young children and their knowledge of theoretical issues concerning their education and development. There may be a place for more formal testing procedures where serious concern is being expressed about a child's progress. However, such testing procedures tend to fall within the remit of specialist outside agencies.

Comprehension

In the early years immersion language context there are two main developmental areas for which information may be gathered – comprehension and speech production. Comprehension is a complex area. It is extremely difficult to measure the fine gradations of progress within the area of comprehension. Children's ability to comprehend the immersion language, involves a number of different processes. In attempting to understand what is being said in the immersion language, children must be actively involved in interpreting gesture, intonation, tone of voice and facial expression. They must relate what they see and feel to the context in which it is occurring. They must reach a decision as to the most likely meaning of what is being said in this context in the light of their past experiences. They must combine the acquired knowledge with the key words that they specifically understand in order to arrive at an approximation of meaning. If they are wrong, they must reassemble or reassess all the information and try again.

Children's ability to comprehend the immersion language is also influenced by a number of differing factors:

- the complexity of the task in the context of their conceptual and experiential maturity
- the complexity of the language being used
- their powers of listening and concentration
- their overall ability
- group size

Staff's assessment of children's ability to comprehend what is being said to them in the immersion language is ongoing. Children's comprehension is indicated by how they respond

through action or speech (in either the home or immersion language). Decisions as to communication actions are immediate, as language usage, facial expression, tone of voice, gesture and contextual clues are adjusted to reflect children's ease of comprehension or difficulty.



It is important to assess children's comprehension of the immersion language in the large diverse group context as well as in the individual or small group situation. It is important to be aware of the degree to which children rely on non-verbal or non-language clues to support meaning. It is important to gather information on their explicit understanding of that key vocabulary which has been addressed through planned exposure in themes and topics. It is important to give the children time to develop an initial comprehension base, in terms of general and specific language both, before moving towards any definitive assessment of their language progress.

Speech production

In many respects, assessment of speech production in the immersion language is easier to observe and assess. Children's spontaneous attempts at speech production follow an established pattern:

from:

- interspersal of single words or phrases, which are in daily or regular use, throughout home language usage

to:

- increasingly frequent substitution of immersion language for home language usage

until:

- immersion language predominates

However, there may be a different pattern between children's use of the immersion language with staff and with their peers. The nature of the situation or context can affect the amount of immersion language that children use. An adult-directed activity is likely to produce more immersion language usage from children than spontaneous play with peers.

In the early stages of immersion language speech production, it is possible to gather specific information with regard to

children's progress, beginning with prompted utterances which may precede child-initiated spontaneous speech production:

- participating in a song or rhyme
- participating in a chorused response in a story-telling session
- giving a negative or affirmative reply to a question
- giving a one-word reply to a question asked, where possible answers have been identified in the question
- giving a one word or two word reply to a question asked where a possible answer has not been identified in the question
- completing an unfinished sentence offered by an adult

The period of time it takes children to move from prompted utterances in the immersion language, to spontaneous single word utterances, to the predominance of immersion language use in most activities and situations, varies and is affected by age, ability, confidence, personality, quality of immersion language exposure inside and outside the setting. However, sustained immersion language use is usually associated with the continuation of immersion language education beyond the early years setting into the primary school.

ACTIVITY



The following table indicates the minimum level of expected immersion language skills on completion of the language programme in an early years setting. Assess children against these competencies on a termly basis.

Comprehension of instructional/organisational/social language including:

Gaibhte.	Come here.
Seas suas, suigh síos.	Stand up, sit down.
Cuir sin síos ar an tábla/chathaoir.	Put that down on the table/chair.
Taispeáin domh an ____.	Show me the ____.
Tabhair domh an ____.	Give me the ____.

Comprehension of high-frequency questions including:

Cá bhfuil an ____?	Where is the ____?
Cé leis an ____?	Who owns the ____?
An dtig leat ____?	Can you ____?
An maith leat ____?	Do you like ____?
Cé rinne ____?	Who did ____?
An raibh ____?	Were ____?



- **Comprehension of a broad base of key words** such as nouns relating to family, toys, animals, transport, weather, clothes, food, parts of body, etc., common adjectives, adverbs and adverbial nouns.
- **Comprehension at a level where the importance of non-language clues** – pictures, facial expression, tone of voice, gestures **is of less significance.**
- **Broad-based comprehension**, sufficient to ensure that there is little or no obstacle to continuing immersion education in the primary school.
- **An ability to participate verbally:** in songs and rhymes, and stories with a repetitive chorus
- **An ability to give single word or two word answers**
- **The production of basic routine social language**
- **An increasing tendency to insert single words or phrases spontaneously in the immersion language while communicating in the home language.**

ACTIVITY



Use picture cards, models or actual size items to assess children's understanding of key vocabulary across a number of themes. Show three or four items at a time, say the word, and ask children to point to the item in question. All children should be assessed individually.



Consider the following questions in relation to the comprehension levels of your children as a group. Is there a minimum level of comprehension throughout the group? Is it sufficient to allow staff to communicate effectively with the group as a whole?

Home language usage

Main points

Assessment of home language usage offers valuable insights about children and their families.

For a significant period of time in an immersion language early years setting, children may use their home language in their interaction with peers and staff. Contributions in the home language will provide significant information about:

- the quality, range and complexity of their home language competence
- the quality of the learning environment in the home

Both of these factors give valuable insights about:

- children's overall ability
- their capacity for language learning
- the potential for family support from the home

These insights help staff make constructive decisions in relation to:

- the type and range of immersion language activities to be provided
- the degree of immersion language support needed by children in a group or in an individual capacity
- how best to support and encourage family involvement in providing immersion language support to children

ACTIVITY



Use the indicators below to assess children's home language use. Assess each child individually. Use the appropriate terms, often, sometimes or never.

Confidence

initiates conversation with other children
 initiates conversation with staff.
 participates in conversation or discussion with children
 participates in conversation or discussion with staff
 demonstrates sustained flow of language

Purposes for which child uses home language

to express needs or wants
 to talk about family or friends
 to talk about an experience or event
 to express an opinion or thought
 to defend or protect self or interests
 to justify behaviour
 to criticise behaviour of others
 to direct actions of others
 to collaborate with others
 to maintain a commentary on their own actions



Problem areas

leaves out 'is' 'are'
 confuses use of 'me' 'I' 'she' 'her' 'he' 'him'
 uses infantile words
 confuses tenses
 confuses plurals
 has limited ability in using negative

has difficulty with the question form
uses 'thing' instead of appropriate word

ACTIVITY



On the basis of the previous activity, draw some conclusions about the quality of the child's home language ability, and the quality of the language environment of the home. Make a comment on the implications of this for the child's immersion language development.

Improving provision

Main points

It is important to use outcomes from assessment, evaluation and monitoring to enhance future planning.

The processes of monitoring and evaluation of provision and assessment of children's progress are essential factors in achieving and maintaining quality. Quality of provision and quality of achievement are inextricably linked. The first leads to the second. The second is impossible without the first. Monitoring, evaluation and assessment should become intrinsic processes embedded in the life and culture of the setting. Monitoring and evaluation form part of a greater on-going cycle of:

- maintenance and consolidation of good practice
- identification of areas for improvement
- action for improvement or change
- review of practice through continuing monitoring and evaluation

Periods of monitoring and evaluation vary in length depending on their purpose and focus, and depending on the issues emerging from the process which need to be addressed.

Sometimes a snapshot of existing practice in key areas will help define initial priorities. Sometimes an external monitoring and evaluation process, such as an inspection, can trigger the beginning of a period of rigorous action to address identified areas, followed by a period of review through continuing monitoring and evaluation.

Sometimes, the process may be triggered internally. For example, children's language competence, when assessed, might fail to match expected levels. This would inevitably bring about an extended period of monitoring and evaluation of strategies of staff language use, or of planning. It would also give rise to an action plan to address identified problems.

Suspected deficiencies in terms of immersion language related display might involve a relatively short time-scale where information can be gathered, analysed quickly and solutions proposed. Inability to maintain sustained verbal interaction with children might involve long-term support for individual staff-members. Sometimes the monitoring and evaluation process constitutes a review of an area which has received a positive evaluation in the past.

ACTIVITY



Describe three improvements to practice that have been put in place as the result of a process of monitoring and evaluation.

Record keeping

Main points

It is important to maintain appropriate records of assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

Records of the processes of assessment, monitoring and evaluation should be maintained for a number of reasons.

Firstly, during the year for which they are current, monitoring

and evaluation records are needed to inform:

- staff, regarding issues of professional practice
- management committees
- external monitoring agencies

Assessment records of children's language achievements are needed to inform:

- staff, regarding issues of professional practice
- parents and families
- receiving school or teachers

Secondly, the processes of assessment, monitoring and evaluation may be useful in informing professional practice and planning in future years.

The maintenance of children's assessment records, or samples of them, beyond their current year gives useful insights into the patterns of children's immersion language achievements within your setting. They can confirm an established pattern. They can alert staff to changes in levels of achievement in subsequent years. They can help to explain changes in achievement levels.

The maintenance of examples of records of monitoring and evaluation beyond their current year can provide a useful history of the setting's development over time. They can provide important information on the roots and rationale of current practice. They can be a source of evidence with regard to good practice in the past, can highlight issues that caused concern and give information as to how they were addressed. They can offer guidance as to how new challenges might be addressed. They can provide specific information on the processes of monitoring and evaluation itself, how effective it has been and how it might be modified, changed or improved.

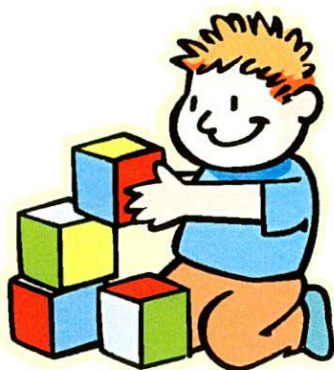
ACTIVITY



Using monitoring and evaluation records, describe to your line manager or management committee a process of monitoring and evaluation which has taken place in your setting. Give information on timescale, area of focus, information gathered, opinions formed, action plan and current situation.

In this section you have looked at ways of using the processes of monitoring and evaluation to improve the quality of children's immersion language learning experiences. You have also looked at the assessment of children's learning. When you have completed this section you should be able to demonstrate that you know the importance of:

- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of planned language activities
- monitoring and evaluating the quality and frequency of staff verbal interaction with children
- monitoring and evaluating the quality and frequency of intentional or planned staff dialogue
- assessing children's immersion language competence
- assessing children's home language competence
- using records of assessment, monitoring and evaluation to inform professional practice and planning
- using outcomes from assessment, monitoring and evaluation processes to address improvement
- maintaining records of assessment, monitoring and evaluation to inform relevant agencies and partners



When you have completed this section you should also be able to demonstrate that you are aware of:

- the positive benefits of assessment, monitoring and evaluation to children and staff alike
- various ways in which assessment, monitoring and evaluation can be carried out

- the value of retaining past records of children's assessment to identify patterns of immersion language achievement
- the value of retaining past records of monitoring and evaluation of provision to contextualize current practice

UNIT THREE



FACILITATING FAMILIES' INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND CONSOLIDATION OF CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE IMMERSION LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- 1: Promoting families' confidence in language immersion education and its value to children's learning and development**
- 2: Encouraging the use of the immersion language in the home setting**

USEFUL READING MATERIAL

