

Information for teachers

Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil

Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil can be defined as the exposure of the learner to the Irish language in a communicative context. In many primary schools, few children have much exposure to Irish outside of school except watching TG4 on television on rare occasions. Because of this, the role of the school and the professionalism of the teacher are of the utmost importance in promoting the use of the Irish language. Here are some tips on how you can support the development of *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* in your school.

Two main aspects of *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* to consider are informal language use within, and outside of, the formal language lesson.

Using Irish within the Irish lesson

The central principle supporting *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* within the formal Irish lesson is that the lesson is taught completely through the medium of Irish. This has many benefits:

- real and genuine communication
- complete immersion in the Irish language for the duration of the lesson
- improved concentration and listening skills - the child has to listen attentively to the teacher to understand what he/she is saying
- improved understanding of phonics and sound combinations
- increased motivation to learn Irish as it is viewed to be a living language that is worthwhile learning and can be used as a means of communication.

Using Irish throughout the school day

The rationale for using Irish incidentally outside the language lesson is to extend the child's contact time with the language because:

- depending on the class level, the subject Gaeilge is only taught in the primary school classroom for between 2 to 3 hours a week. As a result it is difficult to acquire the Irish language in context.
- increasing the use of Irish outside of the formal Irish lesson extends the exposure of children to Irish, and extended contact time with a language improves acquisition
- it reinforces learning as children use phrases and words they have learned in new contexts.

Planning for *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil*

- ☑ Have a **plan**. *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* needs to be planned for formally with the **entire school community** given the opportunity to be involved in the planning and implementation process.
- ☑ Decide as a **whole school** how to address and improve the use of *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil*.
- ☑ Provide a **structure** that teachers can build upon. This helps to avoid repetition year on year which makes *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* very boring.
- ☑ Develop a **checklist** of phrases to be developed from class to class up throughout the school. Read *Gaschaint* by Úna Lawlor for a list of useful phrases.
- ☑ Stick to these **planned phrases** by using them consistently whenever and wherever possible

throughout the school day.

- ☑ Plan for **progression**. e.g. If second class, for example, understand a phrase such as *Tá an pictiúr sin go maith*, this should be extended in sixth class with variations such as *Tá an pictiúr sin ar fheabhas, tá sé go hiontach, tá sé thar barr, tá sé thar cionn, tá sé dochreidte*.
- ☑ Agree a method of **assessment** to evaluate the effectiveness of your *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* plan. Profiles could be used to assess progress as Gaeilge, and teachers could agree assessment criteria.
- ☑ Appoint a **facilitator**. It is important that there is someone who can help direct, co-ordinate and implement the plan.

Some tips to try out

- ☑ Use Irish for **everyday, greetings instructions and commands** e.g. *what happened, put on your coat*, which happen during the day outside of the formal language lesson.
- ☑ Run the **school shop or office** through the medium of Irish. This gives children a reason to use Irish and sets a target of what they need to be able to say and understand for different purposes.
- ☑ Have a **Lá na Gaeilge** once a week. Many schools run a lot of interesting activities during *Seachtain na Gaeilge* but it is important not to solely leave the use of *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* to this week alone. *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* needs to be developed and broadened out over the year so that there is continuity in language use.
- ☑ Develop a **reward system** that supports the use of *Gaeilge*. e.g. *Classes could be rewarded with a prize of getting the opportunity to watch a movie or cartoon as Gaeilge*. Catch children out on yard speaking Irish. The children love it!
- ☑ Stock a **resource room**. A bank of resources to support the use of *Gaeilge* could be collected and stored centrally. e.g. *Irish to Irish dictionaries, electronic resources, interactive whiteboard materials, books etc.*
- ☑ Teach the content of another lesson or parts of the content of another subject through the medium of Irish. This is called **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**. *For example, integrate and use Irish in music, PE, k SPHE or other subjects.*
- ☑ **Respond as Gaeilge** to requests made in English. e.g. Child: *Will you open my bottle please?* Teacher: *Cinnté osclóidh mé do bhuidéal...seo duit...tá sé ar oscailt anois...maith an buachaill/maith an cailín.*
- ☑ Get the children to use Irish when **calling the roll**. Ask each child to say one sentence e.g. *Seán Ó Riain, Chuaigh mé ag snámh inné*. Develop this to reinforce what you are teaching e.g. *vocabulary, phrases or verbs*. As an extension, do not allow phrases to be repeated so that children have to listen to each other.
- ☑ Create a **context for supporting discussion** between pairs of children through the medium of Irish. e.g. *Cut a photograph of an athlete out of a newspaper. Ask children who are beginning to use Irish to list words to describe the picture. Encourage children who have developed more advanced language skills to talk about the photograph for 30 to 60 seconds.*
- ☑ **Share**. Arrange opportunities to see practice in other schools and to **share ideas**. Watch short video clips to see *Gaeilge* being taught successfully through the medium of Irish.
- ☑ **Involve parents**, they can also be a resource. Ask them to help extend the use of Irish at home.
- ☑ If at first the children don't understand instructions or conversation **don't give up**. Talk to the class about why you are using Irish and explain how it helps them to learn. If children translate for one another don't be concerned as it is all part of the language learning process.

Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil...

involves exposing the learners to the Irish language for the purpose of communication by providing them with frequent opportunities to hear and use Gaeilge.

Further reading and information

This information sheet is part of a series of online resources developed through the work of the NCCA's Primary School Network. It summarises the main points of a podcast about *Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil* which you can listen to at www.ncca.ie/en/podcasts.

You will find more information about the Primary School Network on www.ncca.ie/curriculumoverload.