



One, two, trois, quatre, fünf, sechs...

Context:

- A primary school in Dublin, Ireland. English is the language of schooling. The Irish language is a curricular subject that is taught in an integrated manner with English. The official *Primary School Curriculum* allocates 2.5 hours per week for the teaching of the Irish language at this age level.
- There are 27 children in this Junior Infant Class. 23 of these children speak home languages other than English. Within this group there are 10 different language backgrounds. The *Primary Junior Infant programme* requires that children be able to count from 1 to 10 and understand the concept of numbers from 1 to 5.

Reasons for choosing the activity:

- This activity is used as warm-up introduction to a lesson on numbers that follows.

Description:

- The class is seated on the floor in a semi-circle. The teacher invites five children to choose a large foam number from 1 to 5 (→ active language learning). These children arrange themselves in the correct numerical sequence according to the number they hold and stand facing their classmates. An English-speaking child from the class group is then invited to model counting the numbers in English.

- Following this, the teacher asks for volunteers to undertake the same task in a language of their choice (→ meaningful language learning). Several children volunteer and each one is asked to identify the language he/she will use to count the numbers (→ relying on existing linguistic repertoires). Some children choose their home language while others use Irish or English. A Lithuanian child chooses to count in Spanish (→ autonomous learning). When asked how she knows this, she replies that she has learned it from watching a popular television programme for children where Spanish is used in addition to English (→ meaningful language learning).



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Observation:

- By using their home language(s), children are embedding their familiarity and understanding of the concept in question (→ meaningful language learning). By using more than one language, they learn that whichever language is used, the integrity of the numbers and the sequence remains the same (→ relying on existing linguistic repertoires). Giving the children the freedom to choose which language they use helps to support learner autonomy.

Variation:

- When the lesson progresses to the stage of counting with numbers, the same format is used to involve all the languages of the classroom (→ active language learning).

This is an output of the project “Inspiring language learning in the early years - Why it matters and what it looks like for children age 3-12” (2016-2019) of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). The ECML is a Council of Europe institution promoting excellence in language education in its member states. www.ecml.at/inspiringearlylearning.

