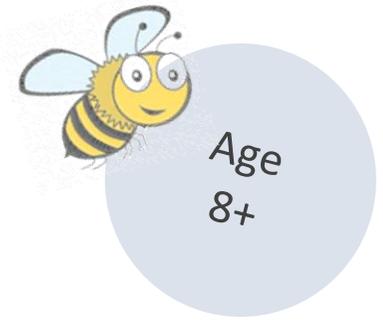


Oliver the dog



Context:

- Primary school in Dublin, Ireland. English is the language of schooling. The Irish language is a curricular subject that is allocated 3.5 hours teaching time per week at this class level. Age 8+. There are 36 children in this Third Class. 30 of these children speak home languages other than English. Within this group there are 14 different language backgrounds.
- While lessons are taught using both the language of schooling, English, and the Irish language as discreet entities. Children are welcome to make comparisons between the language being taught and the languages they already know. There is also time for free writing when children may use whichever language they choose (→ relying on existing linguistic repertoires). Some children also choose to do this at home in their own time simply because they like to do it. They also know that their efforts will be valued and affirmed the next day in school.
- Sometimes children mix the languages they are learning. This is not a cause for concern. In fact, developing dual-language oral and literacy skills contribute to enhanced proficiency across all their languages and allow children to express increasingly complex thoughts and ideas (→ language learning is a process).
- Drawing on the vocabulary and phrases they know from their home language(s) (→ relying on existing linguistic repertoires) supports increased understanding, use, and range of such vocabulary in the language of schooling and additional languages as well (→ language learning is a process).

Reasons for choosing this activity:

- Autonomous writing by a Filipino girl who decides to keep a diary on the exploits of her dog, Oliver (→ autonomous learning).

Description:

- In this extract she describes how Oliver and his friend, the cat, are playing when Oliver decides to run into the nearby wood. The ensuing chase of a red squirrel is then described.
- The child also decides to keep this diary entirely through the medium of Irish (→ language as a process). She comes from a home where the language is Tagalog. This is now her fifth year in the school having started at Junior Infant level (4+). She often produces homework in English, Irish and Tagalog (→ relying on existing linguistic repertoires) even though she is only required to do it in one language (→ autonomous learning).
- When asked about her choice of language for the diary, she says she has chosen to write it in Irish because: “*I like it. I did it for fun.*” (→ meaningful language learning). She has no help from either teacher or parents for this writing.

Observation:

- This work shows how children are happy to engage in what might be described as 'extra work' but which is more often an expression of their interest and engagement in learning (→ active and meaningful language learning). Rather than seeing their efforts as work they see them as being enjoyable.
- An environment that values the languages children bring with them and affirms their efforts to use and develop all their linguistic skills is likely to foster the kind of engagement and outcome seen in this example.
- This child engages autonomously in writing in all the languages she knows simply because it pleases her to do so. In this case she chooses to write exclusively in Irish.

Comment:

- This dialogue shows a well-developed level of proficiency for a child learning her third language (→ continuous and coherent language learning).
- The diary is well constructed, uses a good level of detail and is also quite witty.
- Experience of a classroom environment where the languages and cultures of all children are valued enables an atmosphere that supports learner autonomy.

Oliver Oliver 

Oliver <)
Bhí Oliver sa pháirc.
Bhí an cat sa pháirc, freisin.
Thosaigh Oliver agus an cat ag
sugradh, agus tith Oliver sa
cphóill.
"Déan deifir!" arsa Oliver.
"Ag teacht!" arsa an cat.
"Tá, éis tamail, chonaic an
cat an peist ar an talamh."
"Mama tá cearas orm" arsa an
cat.
Bhí Oliver foinn gearr, agus chonaic
se iora nua, agus chonaic an iora nua
Oliver, Thosaigh Oliver ag tith.
"Stop, stop!" arsa an cat.
"Ní an iora nua ar an gearr."
Thosaigh Oliver ag tairn.
"Tá, éis tamail bhí tairn ar
Oliver agus an cat, agus bhí siad
ina coddáta."