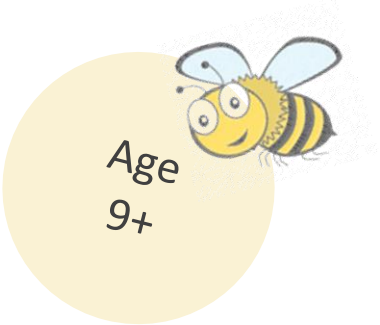

How to make a sandwich …

Context:

- A primary school in Dublin, Ireland. English is the language of schooling. The Irish language is a curricular subject with 3.5 hours per week teaching allocation.
- There are 32 children in this Fourth Class (age 9+). 22 of these children speak home languages other than English. Within this group there are 14 different language backgrounds.

Reasons for choosing this activity:

- The teacher introduces the children to the idea of procedural writing through the medium of Irish. To do this, she chooses a topic that she knows is meaningful for the children, i.e., how to make a sandwich.

Description:

- The teacher and class discuss, in Irish, the series of six steps involved in making a sandwich. This is recorded collaboratively on the whiteboard in Irish. The children then write it in English following the same sequence. Some children spontaneously decide to write it in their home language(s) (→ relying on linguistic repertoires). Others attempt to write it in languages in which they have an interest and are learning with help from classmates, older siblings or neighbours (→ autonomous learning).
- When the teacher realises the degree of children's interest, she suggests that they make posters in the fifteen languages used (→ meaningful language learning). Each girl is then invited to read her poster for the class, thus affirming children's efforts while giving them the opportunity to improve their language proficiency as well.
- Each child then reads aloud from her poster and the teacher suggests that the class might try to identify the word for bread in each of the languages used (→ active language learning). She adds that the final word in the presentations should be 'yum' which is to be translated into each of the languages used. As a finale to the activity, fifteen children stand in a semi-circle and repeat the word 'yum' in their chosen language. Children comment that it is amazing to hear the different representations of 'yum', a word that evokes the same feeling in each of them, in so many languages (→ holistic language learning).

Comment:

- In order to identify the word 'bread' from the wide variety of languages involved in their presentations, children have to listen carefully for similarities of sounds and/or repetition of words (→ relying on existing linguistic repertoires).
- Helped by the sequential nature of the process, another strategy they devise is to assess the point in the delivery at which the word for bread would be used (→ 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.
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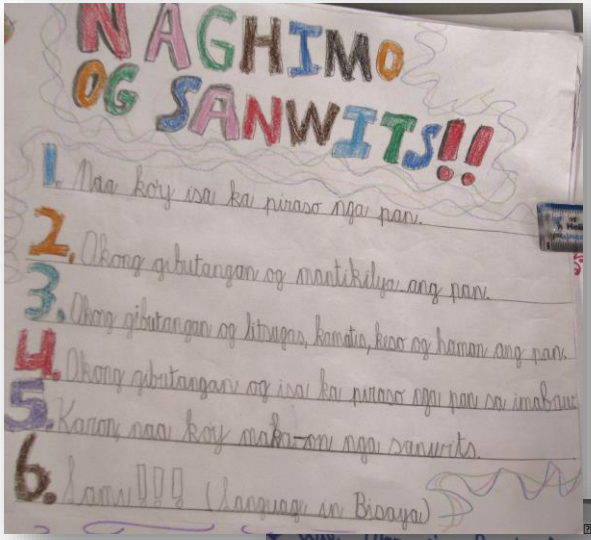
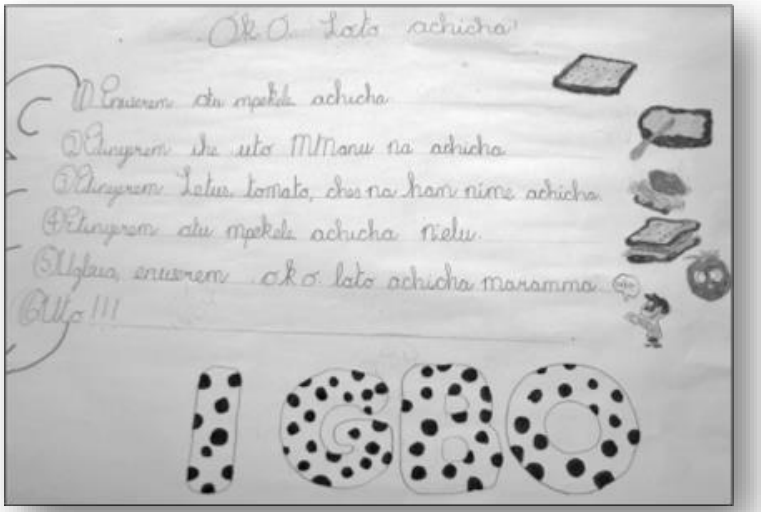
Variation:

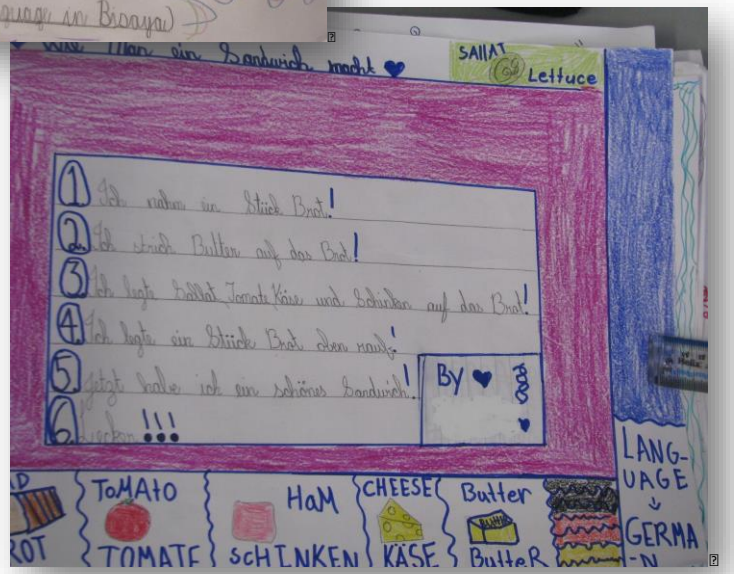
- Variation applies in terms of languages used. All children write the sequence in Irish and in English.
- Others write in their home language(s) (→ relying on linguistic repertoires).
- Some children also write their posters in additional languages that they are interested in learning (→ autonomous learning). Classmates who speak these languages are on hand to help.

Observation:

- Children enjoy the various elements involved in this process, e.g., the opportunity to write in their home language(s) or languages of choice; the work involved in making an attractive poster; the strategies they employ to decode their peers' work written in another language.







Examples 1-3: Texts in Igbo, Bisaya, and German to explain how to make a sandwich

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