



Making Languages Connect with *Say Yes to Languages*

Languages Connect are delighted to bring you the fourth in a series of articles focusing on schools and teachers who have taken part in *Say Yes to Languages*, which is rolling out for a second year. Sinéad de Bháill, a teacher in Summercove NS, Kinsale, highlights how the programme helps pupils understanding of the world as a global village, opens up conversations at home and reimagines the idea of languages for pupils.

Summercove NS is a mixed school located in the beautiful coastal town of Kinsale in Cork. Like the town itself, our school is a vibrant, colourful and energetic place with over 200 children. The area is soaked in beauty and history and its community is diverse and dynamic. Our school population is enriched by the multi-cultural nature of its pupils and its atmosphere is inclusive and warm.

We have welcomed families from nearby and far away to our school, using the children's competence in other languages to teach others and foster a sense of curiosity and wonder about the world.

We were delighted to participate in the *Say Yes to Languages* programme in 2021/22. We chose to pilot the programme in fifth and sixth classes. We felt that it would prepare the children for secondary school when they will study a modern foreign language. We also felt that it would broaden the children's understanding of language, on a meta-level so to speak, and we were interested to see the impact of this on their learning.

World cup of languages

We were thrilled to run the programme



for a second year and the results of our efforts were incredibly rewarding. We were supported and encouraged by our principal, Louise Hallissey, who welcomed the initiative as "an opportunity to complement and reinforce the emphasis on oral language development and the transfer of skills, both of which are pivotal in our new *Primary Language Curriculum*".

Sourcing tutors was easy, as two múinteoirí ranga (myself and my colleague Jean Roberts) were eager to share our linguistic skills in French and Portuguese. This gave us the added advantage of greater flexibility with our timetable, allowing us to integrate our new language-learning across the curriculum.

The enthusiasm of our children was greatly buoyed by the excitement of the World Cup which took place at the time. The tournament was invaluable in strengthening the children's understanding of the world as a global village, enriched by the colours of different flags, the sounds of the languages and the tunes of different anthems. We used every opportunity for learning; investing time in collaborative work, learning about competing countries and consolidating our learning of numbers and colours by describing all things football-related in our new language. We said that our class would be able to chat to Cristiano Ronaldo





in Portuguese if they ever meet him, a prospect the children love!

Let languages move you

Reflecting on the two years of the programme, we found that language-learning is enhanced by introducing movement to our lessons. A strategy that has been long-used for the teaching of Gaeilge. Teachers at primary level are adept at devising dynamic and engaging ways to teach Gaeilge, which transfer effectively to the teaching of a new modern language. Yard-games in which coloured cones and numbers are the focus, often became the highlight of the children's day. The children would benefit from the movement break whilst internalising new vocabulary in a new language.

Sharing knowledge

"While we teach, we learn". I have often shared these words with the children in my class and language-learning is an ideal way to show how powerful Seneca's words are. We received so much positive feedback from parents in relation to the children's enthusiasm for their new language. When I recall our parent-teacher meetings last term, there wasn't a single parent who didn't mention that they were learning Portuguese from their child! It was a source of great amusement that so many children were requesting holidays in Portugal to put their new phrases to use! How rewarding to learn that the children were confident and curious about the language and the place. Now that we are less restricted

in our schools and society, I believe a buddy-system with a junior class would work wonderfully. Older children could pair up with a younger child, mentoring them and teaching them some basics phrases in the language. Not only would this generate enthusiasm for language-learning throughout the school, the older children's learning would be reinforced while becoming empowered by the responsibility and the social skills of both groups would be developed. A win-win for all!

Reimagining languages

It is difficult to summarise the affirming moments we observed during the module, they are too numerous to count. As teachers, we are kept afloat by those moments when we know that the learning experience has been worthwhile and we see greater understanding. One afternoon when group conversations were taking place, describing feelings and body parts in Portuguese. I requested that the children switch to Irish, and then back to Portuguese. It was fascinating to observe and the lesson stayed with me long after it had ended. It was almost as though some of the children re-imagined Gaeilge as a working language, as usable means of communication rather than as a set of rules for the Aimsir Chaite! The transfer of skills, facilitated by a new language, has unlimited potential for all language learning.

In both classrooms, our lessons were enhanced by the *Say Yes to Languages* resources; the pens, bunting and language passports were a big hit with

the children. The children in sixth class celebrated their new skills in French over croissants and pains au chocolat with hot chocolate one winter's morning. All of this made the learning experience exciting. Many of our younger children look forward to participating in the programme.

The culmination of our language module took place at our carol service, when we shared our language-learning with the wider community. As a class teacher and language tutor, it was rewarding to see how enthusiastic our sixth class (who learned Portuguese in 2021/22) remained in relation to the language. They remembered a great deal and some had continued their learning on app. We decided to sing *Feliz Natal (Silent Night)* and all the pupils in third to sixth class learned it together.

On a frosty, festive morning in December, our families gathered to hear our children singing. It was a proud and almost surreal moment to hear the lovely voices, in unison, singing *Feliz Natal* in our beautiful corner of Ireland's south-west, so far from that other sunnier Atlantic coast.

Yes, I thought to myself, language really does connect.

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For more information about *Say Yes to Languages*, email primary@ppli.ie or visit www.languagesconnect.ie.