

An maith leat an Ghaeilge?

An analysis of variation in
primary pupil attitudes to Gaeilge
in Growing Up in Ireland study

Dr. Ann Devitt (TCD)

Ms. Gene Dalton (TCD)

Ms. Jane O'Connell (TCD)

Ms. Melanie Ní Dhuinn (TCD)

Dr. Joe Condon (DIT)



Background to the Study



Aims

Do you like Irish? Always, Sometimes, Never

- Explicit focus on Gaeilge in first wave of 9 year-old cohort GUI data



- Factors that impact on engagement with Gaeilge over and above general engagement with schooling



Language Learning: Attitudes and Attainment

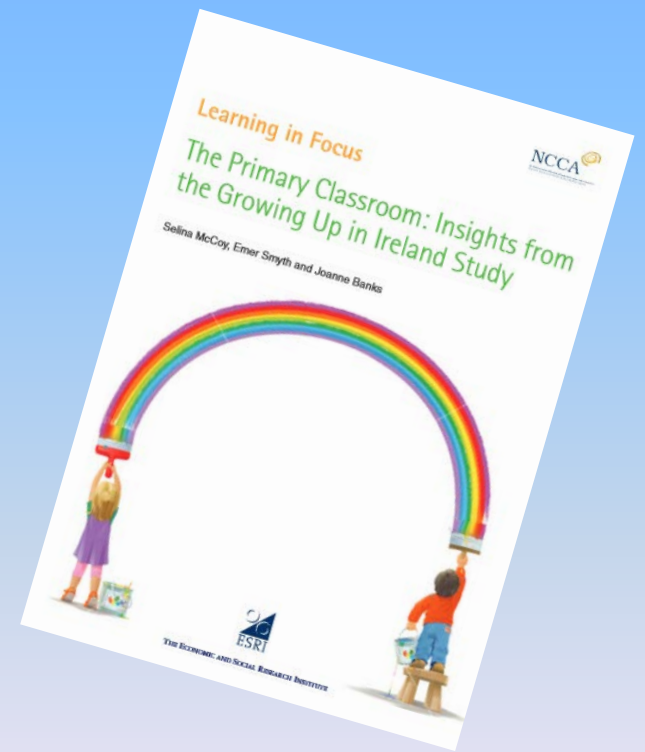
- **Attitude:** A set of beliefs in relation to target language cultures and learner's own culture (Brown, 2007).
- **Causal relationship?** Does a positive attitude towards language learning brings successful learning outcomes or if success in language learning engenders positive attitudes? (Lightbown & Spada, 2006)
- **High levels of motivation can compensate for “considerable deficiencies both in one's language aptitude and learning conditions” (Dörnyei, 1998, p.117)**



Findings from McCoy et al. (2012)

Factors impacting on attitude to Gaeilge

- Study child gender
- Mother's education
- Household type
- Special Educational Need
- Gender mix of school
- Language medium of school





Initial Expectations

- Would the linguistic or cultural background of the child impact on their engagement with Irish?
- Would the literacy habits of the child impact on engagement with Irish?
- Would teacher's teaching and assessment style impact on engagement?
- Would the principal's attitude to Irish in the school impact?



Data Analysis





Do you like Irish?

Do you like Irish?	
Always like it	22.5%
Sometimes like it	51.5%
Never like it	26%

- Positively disposed: 74%



Excess disengagement with Gaeilge compared to other core subjects

	Do you like Irish?		
What do you think about school?	Always	Sometimes	Never
Always like it	10%	13%	3%
Sometimes like it	12%	37%	20%
Never like it	0.5%	1.5%	3%

- 36% of students have a less favourable attitude to Irish compared to School
- The corresponding Stat. for Maths & Reading are 17% and 9% respectively



Statistical Model

- Ordinal logistic regression with a cumulative logits link function (Agresti, 2010).
- Corrected for general school engagement in order to focus on differences in engagement with Irish among otherwise 'similar' students – i.e. . include other engagement measures as factors in the model.
- Looked at a wide selection of predictors at the child, teacher & school levels
- Model building using AIC and LRTs and investigated the possibility of two-way interactions among factors.
- Included random effects at the teacher and school levels to model multilevel aspect – this made a considerable difference.
- Interpretation of random effects as modelling 'latent factors'.
- Software: Ordinal package (R) & Proc Glimmix (SAS)



Factors at Child Level

Educational engagement	school, teacher, maths, reading
Reading behaviour/literacy achievement	favourite pastime, reads with parents, hours reading for pleasure, use of computer, Drumcondra test, parents assessment of child's reading ability.
Other behaviours	time on computer, aggregate total screen time.
Household variables	Socio-economic status, household type, income, education of mother, siblings, multilingualism, multiculturalism
Other	Gender, order within siblings, resource hours for child in school, special needs of child



Factors at Teacher Level

Gender	No. of years teaching	Teaching qualifications
Further qualifications	Multiclass classroom	In-service (CPD) Days
Hours spent on Irish teaching per week	Teaching style	Assessment style
Teacher stress in & teacher satisfaction with job	Teachers' feeling of control over subjects etc.	Teachers feeling's about pupil discipline
Teachers' feelings about happiness of students	Teachers' feelings about happiness of teachers in their school	



Factors at School Level

Region	School gender mix	DEIS status
Patronage	Language medium of instruction	Is Irish important to the school?
Number of admin staff (FTE)	School size	Principals' job stress & satisfaction
Principals' assessment of teachers' job satisfaction		



Results



Results: Child level

Variable	Comparison	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval 95%
Engagement			
School	Sometimes/Always	2.3***	2.1, 2.6
Teacher	Sometimes/Always	1.6***	1.4, 1.7
Reading	Sometimes/Always	1.7***	1.6, 1.9
Maths	Never/Always	1.1	0.9, 1.4
- girls schools		2.4**	1.5, 3.8
- resource hours		1.9**	1.2, 3.2



Variable	Comparison	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval 95%
Multilingualism			
Home language	English / +Irish	1.6***	1.4, 1.8
	English / +Other	0.9	0.8, 1.2
	English / +Irish +Other	0.9	0.6, 1.2
Literacy engagement			
Reads for pleasure	less than weekly / Daily	1.4***	1.2, 1.7
Reads with parents	No / Yes	1.1**	1.0, 1.2
Screen-time	3 or more hours / Less than 1	1.3***	1.2, 1.6
Special needs			
Resource hours	Yes / No	1.9**	1.5, 2.4
-never like maths	Yes / No	1.9*	1.2, 3.0
- always like maths	Yes / No	1.1	0.9, 1.4



Results: School level

Variable	Comparison	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval 95%
School characteristics			
School language medium	English /Gaelscoil	3.3***	2.6, 4.2
	English / Gaeltacht	1.9**	1.2, 2.8
Gender mix (sometimes likes maths)	Boys / Coed	1.2	1.0, 1.5
	Girls / Coed	1.3*	1, 1.6
Patronage	Other / Catholic	1.5***	1.2, 1.9
Region	Rural / Urban	1.1*	1, 1.3
Teacher Characteristics			
Multi-class teaching	Yes / No	1.2*	1, 1.3



NB. No other Teacher level factors were significant.



Results: Random Effects

	80% interval for Random Effects ORs
Teacher Random Effects*	0.6, 1.6
School Random Effects ***	0.6, 1.8
Combined Random Effects	0.5, 2.1

NB: Random effects stayed significant and with only slightly attenuated effect sizes with all predictors included in model.



Key Findings and Discussion



Key Findings

- 74% of students like Gaeilge always or sometimes
- Disproportionate disengagement with Irish compared to general engagement, compared with Maths and Reading
- What are the relevant factors?
 - Engagement with reading
 - Urban / Rural differences
 - Teacher and School Random Effects



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Children's attitude to Gaeilge

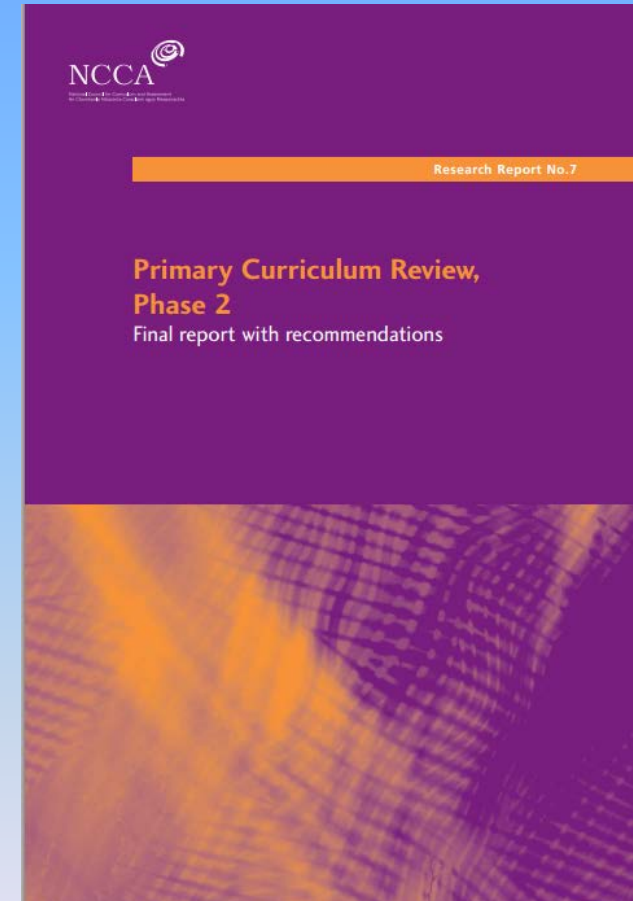
Twenty-Class Study, Harris and Murtagh, 1999:

- To investigate primary school language teaching and learning objectives (apart from language proficiency)
 - (i) to develop a positive attitude to Irish and speaking Irish
 - (ii) to foster a desire to continue to study the language
- (iii) to develop an interest in learning other languages
- **Attitude to learning Irish: % agreeing strongly/slightly**
 - I really enjoy learning Irish: 48%
 - I love learning Irish: 42%
 - I want to learn as much Irish as possible: 50%



Children's attitude to Gaeilge

- NCCA Review of Primary Curriculum found that the introduction of the **1999 curriculum** for Irish had led to an **increase in the children's enjoyment** of lessons and an **increased sense of pride** in the Irish language.
- The review also identified some **problems with language production** due to an imbalance between communicative and analytical language activities
- NCCA (2008)



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Engagement with reading



- Gaeilge at early primary is largely oral

YET

- Engagement with reading impacts engagement with Irish
- Transferable, cross-linguistic skills: metalinguistic awareness
- Common Underlying Proficiency: Developing literacy skills in one language supports literacy skills in another language (Cummins and Ó Duibhir, 2012)
- Policy Implication: Valuing languages at primary



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Urban / Rural Divide



- Children in urban areas more positively disposed towards Irish
- More diverse populations?
 - But no effect of community background
- Vitality of urban Irish speaking communities? (Ó Broin, 2013)
- Policy Implication: *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language*- focus on urban development plans (Government of Ireland, 2010)



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“Irish depends on the attitudes, efforts and commitment of individual schools and teachers in a way that other subjects do not.”

(Harris, 2007, pp.37-38)

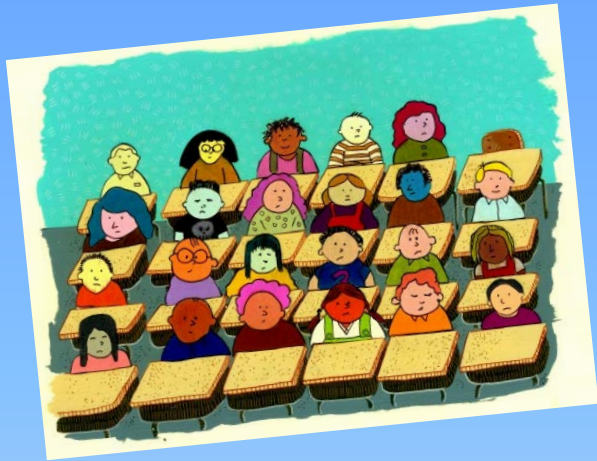


“By the same token, changes in teachers’ attitudes, motivation, self-esteem, or professional satisfaction in teaching are also of greater significance in the case of Irish.”

(Harris, 2007, pp.37-38)

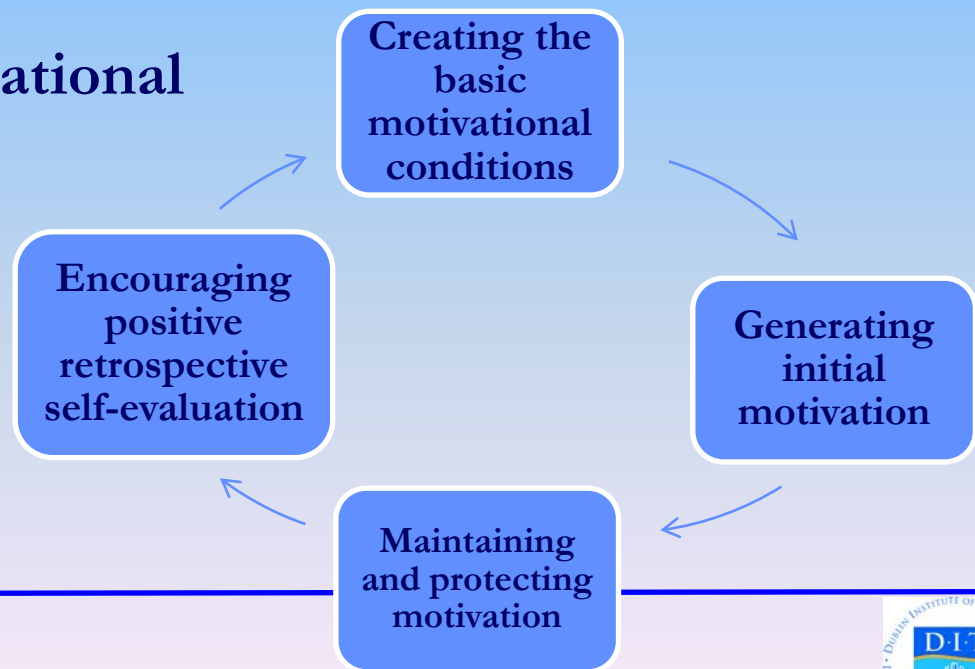


Motivation & The L2 Classroom



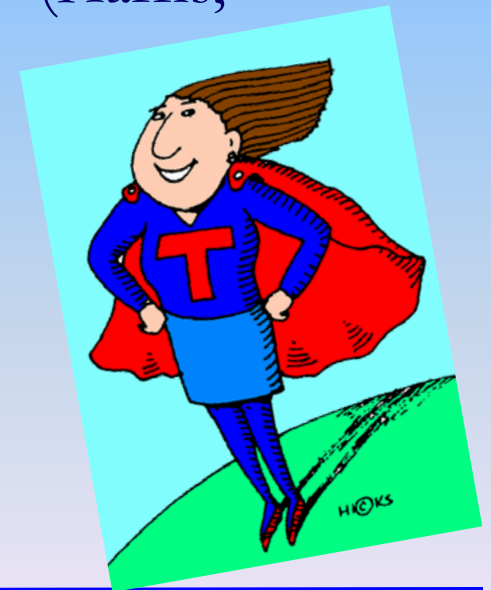
- Framework of L2 motivation (Dörnyei, 1994): L2 classroom featured as a definitive level

- Components of Motivational L2 Teaching Practice (Dörnyei, 2010, p.112)



Teaching Context for Gaeilge

- The **absence of a functional context** impacting on language use and motivation (Murtagh, 2007).
- Irish tends to be ‘**sealed off**’ in English-medium schools which makes it “**difficult for both teachers and pupils** to identify an immediate goal or motivation outside school for learning to speak the language in the classroom” (Harris, 2008, p.63)
- Special role of teacher in teaching students Irish in English medium schools: “the use of Irish does not easily extend beyond the Irish slot without the **special effort of the teacher**” (Harris, 2008, p.63)



Teacher Attitudes to Gaeilge

- Comparison of data from 1985 and 2002, Harris 2006
- Satisfaction derived from teaching Irish:
 - Satisfied: 80% - 55%: down 35%
 - Dissatisfied: 9% - 25%: up 16%
- What factors most affect teacher's emphasis on Irish?
 - Teacher's own outlook on Irish: 46% to 30%: down 16%
 - Official policy: 14% - 28%: up 14%
 - School policy: 7% - 13%: up 6%
- 76.6% of teachers said Irish proficiency declined in schools





Student Teacher Attitudes to Gaeilge

- Majority of student teachers showed positive attitude to Gaeilge (Ó Laoire, 2007)
- This is in line with previous research - CILAR 1975, Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1983, 1993.
- However, this appears to be a:

“Passive stance rather than proactive attitude”
p.181 Ó Laoire, 2007




Classroom Practice for Gaeilge



- Recommendations: (i) use of a more communicative approach, (ii) use of Irish throughout the school, rich language input by teachers, and improved assessment of the subject

- The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12:
 - Teaching of Irish in primary schools- findings notably less positive than for English or Mathematics
- Standard of Irish of teaching unsatisfactory in one fifth of lessons
- Quality of learning unsatisfactorily in almost one quarter of lessons





Teacher cognition and identity

- “What teachers think, know, believe and do” (Borg, 2003, p.81)
- “Complex interplay between the personal and the professional in teachers’ life-worlds” (Devine et al, 2013, p. 103)
- Possible to impact on beliefs and so practice at pre-service and in-service (Borg, 2011)



Key Findings

- Some improvements
- Very definite challenges
- Areas to focus: literacy and the teacher



Policy implications

- Focus on teacher attitude and cognition
- 20 year Strategy:
 - CPD
 - Revised initial teacher education programmes:
 - Revised entry requirements
 - Changing gaeltacht requirement
- Teachers and schools
 - National centre for Irish-medium teacher professional development
 - Supporting pre-school (naoinrai)
 - Short cycle and on-line CPD options



Comparison to Wales



- The recent Welsh language revival has been attributed to two main factors:
 - Welsh being made a compulsory language in schools
 - The availability of Welsh language television
- The demand for education and services to be available through Welsh came from community, not government policy – link to Welsh identity



Comparison to Wales

"You can have as much legislation as you want, you can have as much policy as you want but unless you get in amongst the people and persuade them that the language is useful to them, there's no hope, I think."

Meirion Prys Jones



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