

Policy Briefing- **Module X7928 - Pedagogy 2**

Total Immersion in GME

Rationale:

In order to meet the needs of pupils going through Gaelic Medium Education, the early stages must be established through a secure grounding in the language -Total Immersion. The contributing factors towards how this looks will vary from school to school but it is essential that all teaching practitioners aim to provide high-quality experiences of learning Gaelic and learning through Gaelic.

In the recent Inspectorate report for Gaelic Medium Education, it stated that children in the Early stages of education, "***could be making better progress by having more consistent approaches to total immersion in the language.***" (Education Scotland. 2016) Further to this, the Advice on Gaelic Education 2015 goes on to say that, "Children and young people ***need to experience high-quality total immersion*** as part of Gaelic Medium Education until they have a secure foundation in the language and a level of fluency that will enable them to build on the progress made in Gaelic." (Education Scotland, 2015 - Advice on Gaelic Education. P.2)

In many schools that provide GME, there is little in the way of Gaelic policies that address this area and in the past there has been an assumption that being able to speak Gaelic is enough to be able to teach within this sector. However, through looking at other countries that provide an Immersive language approach there is much to learn and it is clear that a planned approach to how pupils learn the language is the most effective way to provide the high quality education they deserve.

With an increase in numbers of pupils entering GME every year and new teachers being trained to teach within this setting, it is highly important that sufficient training and continuing professional development is provided to ensure the best results for pupils and to give confidence to the staff in their profession.

With this in mind, I propose to outline the pedagogy to support this model of Total Immersion through guidelines for usage within the classroom and school along with research based upon Immersive language programs in other countries.

What is Total Immersion?

*The early stage of learning through the medium of Gaelic, and where **no other language is used**, is referred to as 'total immersion'. Total immersion is developed within the context of The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 where immersion is taken forward in a caring and nurturing environment. (Education Scotland, 2015 - Advice on Gaelic Education. P.9) The Total Immersion phase is usually from P.1 to the end of P.3, although this can vary a little depending on individuals and school policies. The stage from P.4 -7 is known as the Immersion phase as English is introduced, although it is still taught through the medium of Gaelic. By the end of Primary 7 the aim is to bring the learners to the stage of 'broadly, equal competence' in Gaelic and English.'*

Research findings:

In order to understand more fully how language acquisition through Immersive strategies can work best, there are many studies that provide useful lessons which can equally be applied to education through the medium of Gaelic. Some of these examples are noted below and should be strongly considered when implementing this policy.

Finland

This country has adopted an Immersive approach to learning Swedish in schools for over 30 years and through various studies it has shown that **planned** classroom processes in the early years has "resulted in a higher productive second-language than before, and thus point to higher pedagogical standards being attained in the entire immersion programme." (Siv Björklund, Karita Mård-Miettinen & Marjo Savijärvi; 2013 p.203)

Another finding from research in Finland has been the need for the teaching staff to realise the importance of their role as language models. It has been found that the need to provide ample opportunity for language input is essential and that strategies for scaffolding and developing second language skills should be done in a **systematic way**.

Wales

A country closer to home that has achieved much success in the implementation of another language in schools, communities and government is Wales. Since 1939, Welsh has been a part of the education system and in the past 20 years there has been a focus on presenting clear language policies. "In order to ensure their effectiveness, they provide **guidelines** regarding the implementation of such policies and the use of both languages as mediums of teaching and normal communication in each school." (D. Gareth Edwards; 1993, p263) It was

also recognised that in order to ensure the effectiveness of teaching the Welsh language that a comprehensive programme of **in-service training** was required to help teachers understand the proposals more fully and how to best implement them in the daily running of their classes.

Canada

French Immersion in Canada is another example of successful Immersion education and there are several lessons to learn from the research carried out there. Canada originally implemented "naturalistic and communicative approaches to language acquisition." (Genessee 2013) These were only partially effective as there was no planned focus to their language learning and although French medium students had strong comprehension skills, their speaking and writing skills were weaker. (Genessee, 2013, p.30) Although the students had a reasonable fluency they were lacking in areas of accuracy and appropriacy. "One of the goals of second language learning is to develop fluency, accuracy and appropriacy in the language use." (Richard & Rogers, 2014, p.96) Therefore a different approach was adopted and they found that, "Language learning that leads learners to develop their accuracy and appropriacy requires them to attend to relevant language features in the input." (Harley, 1998) Within Canadian Immersion, one key approach to **focus on form** is built on giving pupils opportunities to **notice**, build **awareness** of, and **practice**, grammatical forms. (Lyster, 2007)

Following on from this focus on form as part of the awareness building is how to **draw attention to errors and how to correct them**. In the 1980's in French Immersion there was a lack of consistent teacher feedback with only 19% of grammatical errors corrected. (Harley, 1987) The 90's showed an increase in error correction. Again this highlighted the importance of a **planned approach** to corrective feedback.

Implications:

- Planned systematic approach to language learning should be adopted
- Focus on form within Curricular planning for language learning
- Guidelines adopted for Error corrective feedback.
- Training and CPD should be available for all staff within GME with regard to Immersion strategies and pedagogy.

Planned approach:

In the recent Advice on Gaelic Education documents it continues to endorse the importance of planning the approaches to develop children and young people's knowledge and use of the language. During the Total Immersion phase, grammar and vocabulary is embedded within learning through play. The children hear and absorb the language without thinking about grammar, however the teacher should have a plan of the vocabulary and structure they will be using consistently. "There needs to be a particular focus on embedding key grammar in the total immersion phase that may be considered more challenging to develop later as a discrete lesson in grammar." (Education Scotland, 2015 - Advice on Gaelic Education. P.2)

In the early stages of Total Immersion, language can be embedded through rhyme, song and play but as they progress the children should have more focus on form. The *Noticing, Awareness Building and Practice* structure adopted by Canada is an excellent model to adopt in later Total Immersion and Immersion stages. Further to this, the resource *Mirean* (Storlann, 2018) provides information on the main grammatical patterns of the Gaelic language and also ways for teachers to use them within the class. A planned language approach to immersing children in Gaelic should be done daily or within set language lessons regularly.

Example of Language planning for Primary 1

Targaidean Cànan, le eisimplearan/ Language Targets	Stuth/Dòigh-teagaisg – Resources/Method	Measadh	An Ath Cheum
Simple statements using 'S e/ An e?/ Chan e: e.g 'S e leabhar a tha an sin 'S e seo mo bhràthair. Seo Mairi.	DTT – Cànan – 'S e/an e?/ chan e 'S e sin.../ An e sin...?'S e/ Dè tha an sin?/ 'S e post a tha ann.		
Saying you like /dislike: 'S toigh leam/ An toigh leat?/ Cha toigh leam	DTT – Cànan – 'S toigh leam/ cha toigh... Tha e uabhasach math. Chan eil e math. Tha e dona.		
Bha/An robh?/Cha robh	DTT – Cànan – Bha/ An robh? Cha robh mi a' sgriobhadh. Bha mi trang.		

Error Correction:

Making mistakes is a natural part of language learning and an error is not a symptom of failure, it should help you learn where to plan next. There are various types of corrective feedback which vary in their efficiency but Immersion classrooms need to have a particular view about language errors. "Immersion teachers are often discouraged from over-correcting children's attempts to speak the immersion language. Constant error correction may be self-defeating. Language accuracy tends to develop over time and with experience. When a child constantly makes the same errors, then appropriate but positive intervention may be of value." (Baker & Wright, 2017 p.294)

Where a pupil experiences a word or phrase they are not familiar with they should be encouraged to locate the meaning in a dictionary or the teacher should draw/describe what it is. The English translation should not be used as this undermines their Gaelic by using their first language to promote their learning. *The exceptions to the total use of Gaelic includes comforting a child who is distressed, for an emergency situation or for explaining issues connected to health, safety and wellbeing.* (Education Scotland, 2015 - Advice on Gaelic Education. P.3)

"It is important that schools continue the practice of having a policy on how to correct children's and young people's language errors so that these errors do not become the norm." (Education Scotland, 2015 - Advice on Gaelic Education. P.3)

Consistency and planning is another key feature of this aspect of language learning so that fluency can be developed in a progressive and coherent way.

Training/CPD

In order to fully provide Immersion learning for pupils, the teaching staff should be provided with adequate training and CPD. Promoting achievement through the curriculum and ensuring second language proficiency is "a dual task that requires immersion teacher training at the pre-service and in-service levels." (Baker & Wright, 2017. p.292) To better equip the teaching staff will provide them with more confidence and skills to best achieve the learning environments that enable pupils to learn more fully in all aspects of the curriculum.

The guidelines below provide some advice and practical suggestions for implementing Immersion within the classroom.

Teachers should aim to:

- Provide an extensive and thorough Gaelic Medium curriculum in accordance with CFE outcomes
- Positively promote the Gaelic language at all times
- Adopt an Oral Gaidhlig language programme to introduce, reinforce and consolidate Gaelic language structure and grammar.
- Provide consistent exposure and immersion to the Gaelic Language.
- Teach all curricular areas through the medium of Gaelic.
- Promote learning through eye contact, body language, facial gesture and head movement.
- Immerse learners in the Gaelic language/culture. Songs and rhymes should form an integral part of this phase to build confidence and language acquisition.
- Ensure Gaelic is **always** the spoken language of the class, using rewards/incentives to foster the use of Gaelic.
- Speak Gaelic to Gaelic speaking colleagues/staff when learners are present to promote the value and importance of the language to everybody within the school.

Conclusions:

With all this in mind it is clear to see that Total Immersion is the most effective way of acquiring a second language. "Total immersion leads to total fluency. Alternative models lead to the dilution of fluency and are as such non-compatible with the development of strong and sustained Gaelic Medium Education." (Education Scotland, 2015 - Advice on Gaelic Education. P.3) This can be best achieved by providing educators with the appropriate training on language acquisition and the continuing development of their skills through in-service. In turn this will build confidence and skills in teaching staff which will impact the pupils' learning in a more positive way.

A clear framework & plan for implementing language learning is paramount to achieving this more fully, along with set guidelines on daily use, including error correction advice. The need for a planned approach is evidential from the research shown and should be adhered to within all school that provide GME.

With an ever-increasing number of children entering GME, it is essential that all teachers are provided with the opportunities to most effectively create an immersion classroom. Through the points outlined in this policy I hope that they will be adopted and implemented more consistently throughout schools that endeavour to achieve the highest standards of Gaelic Medium Education.

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