

Plean Teanga  
do Réamhscolaíocht agus do Luathbhlianta  
An Tumoideachais Ghaeilge

A Language Plan for Irish-Medium  
Preschool and Early Years' Immersion



altram  
guth na luathbhlianta

**Plean Teanga do Réamhscolaíocht agus do Luathbhlianta An Tumoideachais Ghaeilge**  
**A Language Plan for Irish-Medium Preschool and Early Years' Immersion**

Céad fhoilsiú 2018

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*Foilseachán maoinithe ag:* Páirtíocht Cúram Leanaí - Publication funded by: Childcare Partnerships



# Plean Teanga do Réamhscolaíocht agus do Luathbhlianta An Tumoideachais Ghaeilge

A Language Plan for Irish-Medium  
Preschool and Early Years' Immersion

The guidance in this resource is based on material contained in  
'Two Windows on the World'  
by Áine Andrews.

## Providing an Effective Irish Language Immersion Environment

Children's Experiences	Staff Activities
<p>Children will hear Irish at all times when staff interact and communicate with them in a wide variety of diverse contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Staff will speak and use Irish at all times when they interact and communicate with children, including during:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• social interaction;</li><li>• daily routines;</li><li>• addressing children's emotional needs;</li><li>• supporting positive relationships;</li><li>• managing children's behaviour;</li><li>• organisational and transition contexts;</li><li>• play and learning activities.</li></ul></li></ul>
<p>Children will hear Irish spoken by staff which is articulated clearly and accurately and is grammatically correct.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Staff, in their use of Irish, will:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• enunciate clearly;</li><li>• pronounce words appropriately with particular reference to the most common characteristic sounds in Irish such as 'ch';</li><li>• demonstrate consistent accuracy in grammatical usage.</li></ul></li></ul>
<p>Children will hear Irish spoken at all times when staff interact and communicate with one another during the course of a session.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Staff will speak and use Irish at all times when they communicate and interact with one another, including during:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• social and casual interactions;</li><li>• collaborating with one another in supporting the efficient day to day organisation of the setting and its daily routine;</li><li>• collaborating with one another in the effective delivery of play and learning activities;</li><li>• collaborating with one another in facilitating and maximising children's participation and engagement in play and learning activities;</li><li>• collaborating with one another in facilitating and maximising spontaneous opportunities for children's learning;</li><li>• collaborating with one another in the effective delivery of all planned language activities.</li></ul></li></ul>

## Providing an Effective Irish Language Immersion Environment

### Staff Knowledge and Understanding

#### ◆ Staff know and understand that:

- children learn Irish by hearing it spoken;
- there are differences between the home language learning process and the immersion language learning process;
- the optimum home learning environment which promotes successful home language learning differs significantly from the optimum learning environment in which children learn Irish in an immersion setting.

#### ◆ Staff know and understand:

- the importance of maximising exposure to Irish throughout the course of all activities, by maximising their interaction with children and their own language output.

#### ◆ Staff know and understand that:

- children learn Irish by hearing it spoken;
- Irish language acquisition in early years lays the foundation for the building of further Irish language skills;
- indistinct, sloppy, mumbled formation of sounds and words, on the part of staff, or mispronunciation, may compromise children's ability to develop an authentic phonic base for their Irish language skills;
- consistent inaccuracy in key grammatical areas on the part of the staff may compromise children's ability to develop an awareness of underlying grammatical rules and patterns and achieve ultimate accuracy in their own Irish language usage.

#### ◆ Staff know and understand that:

- children learn Irish by hearing it spoken;
- children's exposure to Irish, even at an unconscious level, provides useful learning benefits for children;
- staff use of Irish in communication with one another gives children a consistent message about the importance of Irish within the setting;
- staff use of Irish provides important modelling of two-way communication in Irish, that supports the children's successful progression towards their own communication in Irish with staff.

## Providing an Effective Irish Language Immersion Environment

Children's Experiences	Staff Activities
<p>Children will hear Irish spoken regularly by staff in their interactions and communications with the children's carers and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Staff will use Irish at all times with children's families in all greeting and farewell contexts.</li><li>◆ Staff will use Irish which reflects the Irish language competence of children's families.</li><li>◆ Staff will use Irish which supports family learners in gaining confidence in beginning to use some basic stand alone phrases.</li><li>◆ Staff will not engage with one another in obvious extended interactions in English within areas of children's activities or hearing.</li></ul>
<p>Children will hear Irish spoken periodically by staff in their interactions and communications with visitors to the setting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Staff will use Irish at all times with visitors in all greeting and farewell contexts.</li><li>◆ Staff will use Irish that reflects the Irish language competence of visitors.</li><li>◆ Staff will not engage in obvious extended interactions in English with visitors within areas of children's activities or hearing.</li></ul>

## Providing an Effective Irish Language Immersion Environment

### Staff Knowledge and Understanding

#### ◆ Staff know and understand that:

- children learn Irish by hearing it spoken;
- families have an important role to play in an immersion language context;
- it is important that families are supported in acquiring a basic minimum level of Irish;
- it is important that families are encouraged to use whatever Irish they have;
- family usage of Irish complements the work of the setting and supports the development of the children's competence in Irish;
- the use of Irish within families provides a bridge between home and setting;
- that staff usage of Irish with families gives children a consistent message about the importance of Irish within the setting and within the family context;
- the use of Irish within the family context enhances and extends the value that the children attach to it.

#### ◆ Staff know and understand that:

- children learn Irish by hearing it spoken;
- staff use of Irish in communication with visitors to the setting gives a consistent message to the children about the importance of Irish within the setting;
- when children hear Irish being used with visitors, it authenticates it as a language beyond the confines of the setting.

## Supporting the Development of Children's Ability to Understand Irish

Children's Experiences	Staff Activities
<p>Children will have language experiences that facilitate and support them in understanding the Irish they hear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ In their use of Irish, staff will:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use a simple register with a predominating use of the verb 'to be' and the present tense;</li><li>• provide a wide range of non-language clues including;<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- body language such as gesture and facial expression;</li><li>- expressive tone of voice;</li></ul></li><li>• collaborate with one another to model actions;</li><li>• speak clearly;</li><li>• focus on the 'here and now';</li><li>• use a range of contextual clues that engage the children's senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and feeling;</li><li>• ensure active participation of children.</li></ul></li><li>◆ Staff will provide opportunities to support the development of children's ability to understand Irish across a range of diverse language activities across the breadth of the curriculum.</li><li>◆ Staff will be mindful of the different rates of language learning progression amongst children and will provide regular opportunities for small-group and 1-1 adult interaction.</li></ul>



# Supporting the Development of Children's Ability to Understand Irish

## Staff Knowledge and Understanding

- ◆ Staff know and understand that:
  - early language acquisition involves 'guessing' at meaning;
  - visual, auditory and contextual support help children to guess effectively;
  - Irish should be spoken by staff naturally and in a way that is appropriate to the nature of the activities;
  - language activities should focus on the 'here and now';
  - past and future events are conceptual and linguistic challenges for the young child even within a home language context;
  - children's practical hands-on active participation in language activities increases their motivation, engagement and ability to process contextual clues;
  - children's practical hands-on active participation in language activities supports their understanding and promotes concept formation;
  - the importance of introducing new and unfamiliar language in a practical hands-on manner;
  - group size impacts on children's concentration and ability to assemble and interpret non-language clues.
  
- ◆ Staff know and understand:
  - the importance of providing a balance between language that is just at the level of children's competence and language which stretches their competence;
  - the importance of monitoring how well children are understanding what is said, as it is said, and adjusting non-language clues or language register accordingly;
  - the differing manifestations of Irish language comprehension;
  - how the cognitive and experiential levels of children impact on their ability to process information that facilitates their understanding;
  - how the listening and concentration skills of children impact on their ability to process information that facilitates their understanding;
  - how to address the needs of individual children in supporting their ability to understand Irish.
  
- ◆ Staff are familiar with:
  - the stages in the continuum of Irish language acquisition in an immersion setting;
  - the expected milestones in Irish language acquisition in an immersion setting.

## Supporting Children's Ability to Remember Key Aspects of Irish

### Children's Experiences

Children will have language experiences that facilitate and support them in remembering and retaining key aspects of the Irish they hear, such as:

- common phrases;
- common instruction;
- common questions;
- high frequency naming, describing and action words.

### Staff Activities

- ◆ Staff will identify common stand-alone phrases, instruction and questions that form an integral part of:
  - social interactions;
  - daily routines;
  - praise and encouragement and comforting;
  - caution and admonishment;
  - organisation and transition;and whose regular and frequent usage is an integral aspect of a settings language-rich provision.
- ◆ Staff will identify the key high frequency naming, describing and action words that are the main focus of planned language learning.
- ◆ Staff will plan a variety of experiences for children across the breadth of the appropriate developmental areas that facilitate and support natural usage of these high-frequency items.
- ◆ Staff will plan children's language experiences in ways that build on and consolidate children's emerging language competence.
- ◆ Staff will incorporate regular story-telling, singing and games in supporting planned focus and reiteration of high-frequency language items.
- ◆ Staff will incorporate children's participation in the making of concrete language referrals in supporting planned focus and reiterations of high frequency language items.
- ◆ Staff, in their interactions and communication with children, will maintain frequent and sustained flow of language within a language register that:
  - reflects children's conceptual development;
  - reflect children's current Irish language competence;
  - ensures effective implementation of the overall planned language focus;
  - ensures frequent focus and reiteration of identified high-frequency vocabulary.
- ◆ Staff will employ strategies of:
  - sequential repetition;
  - restatement;
  - expansion;
  - staged dialogue;to maximise opportunities for children to hear language of planned focus.
- ◆ Staff will provide opportunities to support the development of children's ability to remember Irish across a range of diverse language activities across the breadth of the curriculum.
- ◆ Staff will be mindful of the different rates of language learning progression amongst children and will provide regular opportunities for small-group and 1-1 adult interaction.

# Supporting Children's Ability to Remember Key Aspects of Irish

## Staff Knowledge and Understanding

### ◆ Staff know and understand:

- the vital importance of consistent repetition and exposure in developing children's ability to remember language;
- which aspects of language lend themselves to naturally occurring consistent repetition and exposure, for which specific planning is not required;
- which aspects of language require specific planning;
- the rationale for the identifying naming, describing and action words, as key words of planned language learning;
- the rationale for identifying high-frequency key word priorities within the overall key word base;
- the value of a topic approach for planned language exposure;
- the importance of establishing and consolidating the language of previous planned language topics;
- the value of storytelling, singing and games in supporting a planned language approach;
- the value of children's participation in the making of concrete language referents in a planned language approach;
- that children's practical hands-on active participation in language activities facilitates their ability to remember key aspects of Irish and promotes concept formation;
- the language exposure potential of all play activities;
- the importance of identifying priority vocabulary in activities such as sand, water, home corner play;
- the value of physical play in reiterating words of body parts and physical movement.

### ◆ Staff know and understand:

- the important role of collaboration and teamwork in planning for and implementing language learning activities;
- the importance of providing a balance between language that is at the level of children's competence and language that stretches their competence;
- the importance of using the full range of immersion language communication techniques;
- the importance of becoming familiar with and confident in using strategies of sequential repetition, restatement and expansion;
- the importance of becoming confident and comfortable in collaborating with one another in using strategies of staged dialogue;
- the importance of being familiar with the full range of resources in the setting and how they support language learning in general terms;
- the importance having familiarity with resources that support a topic-based approach to planned language learning;
- the importance of remaining on the alert for opportunities to interact with children and use key language with them;
- how to address the needs of individual children in supporting their ability to remember key language.

### ◆ Staff are familiar with:

- the stages in the continuum of Irish language acquisition in an immersion setting;
- the expected milestones in Irish language acquisition in an immersion setting.

## Supporting the Emergence of Children's Ability to Speak Irish

### Children's Experiences

Children will have learning experiences that facilitate and support them in moving along the continuum of developing speech in Irish:

- from the purely imitative
- to single word/phrase insertion and single word answers
- to increasingly extended speech in Irish in meaningful contexts.

### Staff Activities

- ◆ Staff will :
  - build and consolidate children's increasing language competence through;
    - continuing planned focused language learning activities;
    - continuing collaboration of staff in maintaining sustained Irish language output in their interactions and communication with children;
  - ensure the incorporation of stories within the story repertoire that encourages group verbalisation of a chorused refrain or response;
  - ensure the regular participation of children in games that encourage a single word or single phrase response;
  - ensure regular participation of children in singing together;
  - collaborate with one another in modelling appropriate verbal responses to support similar responses from children;
  - ensure that children have opportunities to experience and engage with puppets;
  - include questions that encourage single word or single phrase responses from children;
  - offer opportunities to children to verbalise a preference/choice between 2/3 items in their verbal interaction with children.
- ◆ Staff will provide opportunities to support the development of children's ability to speak Irish across a range of diverse language activities across the breadth of the curriculum.
- ◆ Staff will be mindful of the different rates of language learning progression amongst children and will provide regular opportunities for small-group and 1-1 adult interaction.

## Supporting the Emergence of Children's Ability to Speak Irish

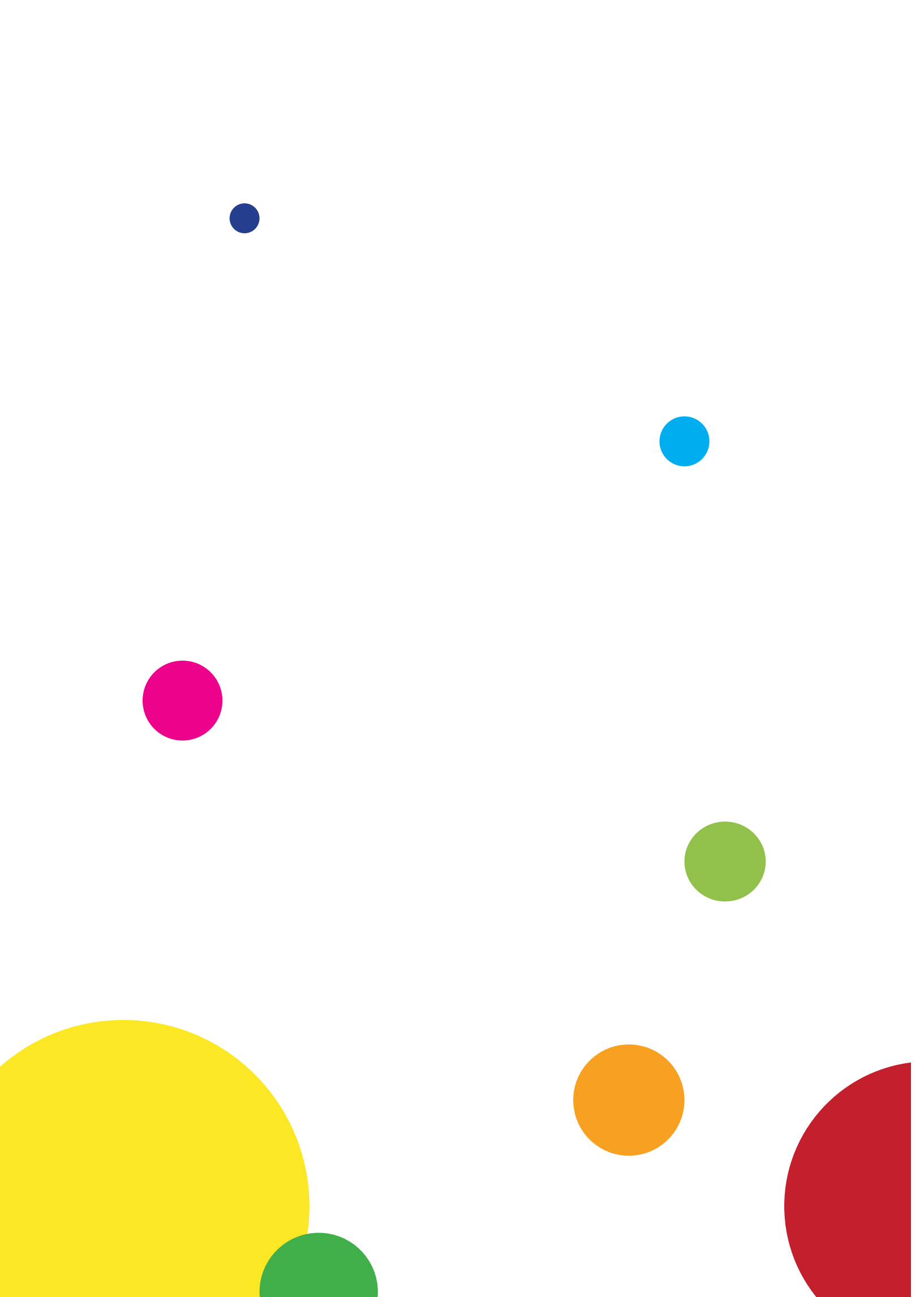
### Staff Knowledge and Understanding

#### ◆ Staff know and understand:

- the differing manifestations of Irish language production and their significance;
- the importance of responding positively to children's attempts to use Irish;
- that children's practical hands-on active participation in language activities facilitates and supports their ability to speak Irish and promote concept formation;
- the importance of modelling of 1-1 communication in Irish;
  - in communication between staff;
  - in communication with a puppet, particularly with a child puppet;
  - in communication between two puppets, particularly child puppets;
  - in communication with children who reliably respond in Irish;
- how to address the needs of individual children in supporting their ability to speak the immersion language.

#### ◆ Staff are familiar with:

- the stages in the continuum of Irish language acquisition in an immersion setting;
- the expected milestones in Irish language acquisition in an immersion setting.





Altram is an Irish-medium Early Years Regional Support Organisation.  
It provides a range of services to practitioners, parents and pupils  
in Irish-medium early years immersion settings,  
including training, on-site visits, resources, representation and advocacy.  
It also provides support to management committees,  
in relation to governance and good practice and  
in addressing the specific issues which pertain to an immersion context.

*Uimhir Charthannachta* - Charity No. NIC 103690

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This resource has been created to support practitioners in Irish-Medium Early Years Immersion settings in planning effectively for the Irish Language needs of the children who attend them. It will be useful for practitioners at both Preschool and Foundation levels. The resource provides guidance on:

- the language learning opportunities which best support children’s learning;
- the nature and quality of staff activities and the skills they need to be effective;
- the staff knowledge and understanding base underpinning good practice.

The resource provides in a more condensed format much of the guidance contained in ‘Two Windows on the World,’ by Áine Andrews. Practitioners are recommended to refer to this publication for more comprehensive or detailed information.

