



Engaging with Linguistic Diversity

A Study of Educational Inclusion in an Irish Primary School

David Little & Déirdre Kirwan

This book analyses a highly successful and innovative approach to inclusive plurilingual education at primary level and demonstrates how it can be replicated without access to special funding or resources.

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Engaging with Linguistic Diversity describes an innovative and highly successful approach to inclusive plurilingual education at primary level. The approach was developed by Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), Blanchardstown, as a way of converting extreme linguistic diversity – more than 50 home languages in a school of 320 pupils – into educational capital. The central feature of the approach is the inclusion of home languages in classroom communication. The benefits, which accrue to pupils from native Irish as well as immigrant families, include: an unusually sophisticated degree of language awareness; high levels of age-appropriate literacy in English, Irish, French and home languages; and from an early age, the motivation and capacity to undertake ambitious autonomous learning projects.

After describing the national context, the book traces the development of Scoil Bhríde's response to an increasingly diverse pupil cohort and goes on to explore in detail the impact of the response on classroom discourse, pupils' literacy development, and their capacity for autonomous learning. The authors illustrate their arguments with a wealth of practical evidence drawn from a variety of sources; pupils' and teachers' voices are especially prominent. Bearing in mind that Scoil Bhríde developed its approach without access to special funding or resources, the concluding chapter considers issues of sustainability and replication and the implications of the approach for teacher education.

The book makes sustained reference to a wide range of relevant research findings and theories, including translanguaging, plurilingual and intercultural education, language awareness and language learner autonomy. It is essential reading for researchers and policy-makers in the field of linguistically inclusive education.

David Little was formerly Director of the Centre for Language and Communication Studies and Head of the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. For the past ten years, he has played a leading role in the Council of Europe's work on the language education of migrants.

Déirdre Kirwan was principal of Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), Blanchardstown, Ireland, from 1987 to 2015. In 2008 she was nominated European Ambassador for Languages (Léargas) for her active promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in the school, and in 2009 she received her PhD from Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, for her research in this area.



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