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1. Raising Awareness

What measures should be undertaken to promote awareness, at national, community, enterprise and individual level, of the importance of language learning and to increase interest in and motivation for foreign language learning?

2. Supporting migrant languages in educational settings

How can we encourage our migrant children to become proficient in the language of their adopted community, while at the same time maintaining oral, written and cognitive academic language proficiency in their own mother tongue?

CPD for teachers needs to focus on 'culturally relevant pedagogy' (Ladson Billings, 1995) so that recognition of students' first languages moves beyond superficial approaches rooted in 'soft multiculturalism' and moves firmly into the classroom. Teachers' pedagogical approaches need to include first languages in active and meaningful ways; such as, engaging students in writing identity texts and creating dual language books; enabling students to work through their first languages in an appropriate and targeted way where this facilitates a student's learning; making story books / library books available in a range of languages; building meaningful links with parents and communities so that all languages are welcome and visible in school; and implementing language awareness approaches that develop metalinguistic competence on the part of all students, not just minority language speakers.

The education system needs to shift from a deficit perspective on minority language learners (i.e. as a 'problem' that needs to be 'solved') and become aware of the 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzales, Moll & Amanti, 2005) that migrant students bring with them to school. These funds of knowledge include the rich cultural, linguistic and ethnic capital that migrant students and their families bring to education in Ireland. If students and their families see their languages, their knowledge, and their cultural practices becoming a real part of classroom pedagogy, this helps to reduce the potential for a 'cultural split' (Igoa, 1995) between home and school.

In summary, language policy cannot be seen in isolation from a type of intercultural education which is rooted in the principles of critical multiculturalism, in that issues of equality and justice are paramount. In this context, a focus on language cannot be separated from a study of societal power relations. It therefore cannot become a debate purely about linguistics or merely about 'strategies'. In order to genuinely support migrant languages in educational settings, educators and policy makers must engage in a broader political discussion which recognises the power differentials within society and in schools.

3. Learning and Teaching

How can foreign language learning be supported for students from post-primary educational settings and thereafter? You may wish to concentrate on one educational sector.

4. Teacher Education

How can we ensure an adequate and ongoing supply of highly-skilled, professional teachers/trainers of foreign language at all educational levels to meet ongoing and emerging needs?