

**ITE provision in minority language contexts: The case of Wales and Ireland**

## Abstract

Within the broader contexts of language maintenance, revitalisation and use, schools have an important role to play in the early transmission of minority or minoritized languages. Through effective classroom-based practices, teachers can offer rich, continuous linguistic experiences for the young people they teach that can lead to long-term, sustained engagement with language over time. How effective a given approach or practice may be in delivering a linguistic outcome in different contexts depends to a large extent on the skills and competence of the teacher involved (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018, p. 59), and the skills and competence of the teacher are usually rooted in their early experiences as student teachers. Initial teacher education (ITE) programmes are therefore central to the delivery of effective classroom-based practices and fundamental in generating autonomous teachers who can explore critically the different pedagogical approaches as they pertain to minority language contexts. This paper provides a comparative overview of the current issues and challenges facing ITE for primary education in two distinct minority language settings, namely Wales and Ireland. Both settings provide Welsh-medium or Irish-medium immersion education, as well as English-medium education offering Welsh or Irish as statutory subjects up to age 16. Both contexts also offer ITE programmes through the medium of Welsh or Irish, catering specifically for those student teachers wishing to teach in immersion settings. Both contexts face a number of shared challenges in terms of the content, design and delivery of an effective ITE programme for the context. We therefore highlight areas in which resources and methodologies could be shared amongst all those involved in ITE where minority language maintenance is a key component of education.

*Keywords:* Minority language, initial teacher education, immersion education, bilingual education, Welsh, Irish

## **1. ITE provision in Minority Language Contexts: The case of Wales and Ireland**

It is widely accepted that language revitalisation is not possible without some level of inter-generational transmission within the family (Fishman, 1991). However, in minority language contexts where bilingualism is the norm, inter-generational transmission of the minority/minoritized language is limited, and relying on home-based transmission for the long-term sustainability of the language may not be viable. Alternatively, education systems – as formative institutions in society – are frequently sourced to support minority languages (Ferguson, 2006), both as a ‘vehicle’ to develop new generations of speakers and as a ‘tool’ to support wider approaches to language revitalisation (Baker & Wright, 2021; Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006). However, ensuring teachers are adequately prepared for the complexities of teaching within immersion settings, particularly where exposure to the target language outside of school is limited, remains a challenge (Leavy et al., 2018).

Whilst various bilingual education systems across the world have been shown to deliver effective outcomes in terms of additive bilingualism<sup>1</sup> for their pupils (Baker & Wright, 2021), minority language transmission within education alone cannot guarantee systemic revitalisation of minority languages (Fishman, 1991). Studies have shown that daily exposure to the target language as a medium of instruction at school does not necessarily result in children and young people’s uptake of the language (Dunmore, 2018; Morris, 2010; Thomas & Roberts, 2011; Thomas, Lewis & Apolloni, 2012; Thomas, Apolloni & Lewis, 2014; Gathercole & Thomas, 2009; Ní Thuairisg & Ó Duibhir, 2019; Price & Tamburelli, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Additive bilingualism is a term used to describe situations where an additional language is added to the speaker’s first (or native) language, at some point in time, without replacing that language (Baker & Wright, 2021).

Nevertheless, schools still remain the principal method through which language revitalisation efforts are concentrated.

Much of the challenges schools face in developing minority language competences for immersion contexts, and how universities prepare student teachers for these challenges, are likely to be experienced similarly in various contexts around the world (Fortune & Tedick, 2008). These shared commonalities lend themselves well to collaboration. Whilst there have been some attempts at exploring the opportunities to share examples of innovative linguistic and pedagogical practice in Wales and Ireland, particularly at the primary school level (e.g., Ní Thuairisg, 2012), the potential for collaboration in ITE is underdeveloped. In this paper, we begin with an outline of the current linguistic context in Ireland and Wales, followed by a discussion of primary education and ITE programmes. We end with recommendations for content and collaborative opportunities across ITE programmes in minority language contexts.

## **2. Sociolinguistic and Sociopolitical Contexts**

Although native to the British Isles, and among the oldest languages in Europe, modern day Irish and Welsh are characterised both as minority/heritage languages, in the sense that they are spoken by a small proportion of the overall populations within their respective countries, and as minoritized languages, in the sense that they are often afforded less prestige or status and largely marginalised to specific domains (Council of Europe, 1992; Dunne, 2020; Montrul, 2016). However, whilst similar in terms of their ‘minority’ and ‘minoritized’ status, the sociolinguistic/sociopolitical contexts in Wales and Ireland differ in various respects. These differences impact on the type of education, support and

experiences students require during their ITE in order to become effective educators and help Welsh-/Irish-medium and bilingual education<sup>2</sup> to flourish.

## 2.1 Ireland

Irish Gaelic, more commonly called *Irish* in Ireland, belongs to the Celtic branch of Indo-European languages. Irish is one of the 200+ languages that are spoken in Ireland. Despite being the first official language of the state, as noted above, Irish is considered a minority language in terms of the number of daily speakers (Dunne, 2020).

*Gaeltachtaí* or Irish-speaking regions refer to areas in which Irish is usually the first language spoken daily by the community. The most recent studies of *Gaeltachtaí* by Ó Giollagáin and colleagues (2007/2015) designate three different categories of Gaeltacht according to percentages of speakers who use Irish for daily communication. In Category A, 67% use Irish daily, in Category B, 44-66%, and in Category C, less than 44%. There is a reported decline in Category A regions, with English usually being the stronger language of young children and the main language of socialisation (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015; Péterváry et al., 2014). As Ní Thuairisg and Ó Duibhir (2019) show, however, this trend may be linked to limited opportunities outside of school in which young people can use Irish.

Census data from 2016<sup>3</sup> indicates that around 40% of the population report speaking ability in Irish but about 24% of this group report never speaking Irish. Active speakers of

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<sup>2</sup> We use Welsh-medium and Irish-medium education to refer to immersion-type education programmes where the majority of the delivery, particularly in the early years, is targeted towards the minority/minoritized language. It is widely accepted that immersion education is a strong form of bilingual education (Baker & Wright, 2021). However, immersion is only one form of bilingual education. For that reason, we use the term ‘bilingual education’ as an umbrella term to refer to alternative types of educational delivery where two languages are involved (e.g., dual stream school; two-way education; the target language taught in content and language integrated approach; the target language as a subject only).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp10esil/p10esil/ilg/>

Irish are mainly within the education system. Only 1.7% of the population report speaking Irish daily and 2.5% weekly, outside of the education system. Census data reveal that around two thirds (66.3%) of people living in the Gaeltacht report speaking ability in Irish and around a fifth (21.4%) speak Irish daily outside of the education system (CSO, 2016). Within language planning policies for individual *Gaeltachtaí*, there is also diversity in the percentage of Irish speakers, as well as local supports available through Irish (Ní Chuaig et al., 2021). This mirrors observations on the changing demographics in formal education and diversity of languages now present in Gaeltacht schools, adding to the complexity of promoting Irish as a first language (Ní Longaigh, 2016; Ní Shéaghdha, 2010).

Government planning for the revitalisation and maintenance of Irish is outlined in the 20-Year Strategy for Irish (GOI, 2010) and the Policy for Gaeltacht Education (DES, 2016). Primary schools, especially Gaeltacht schools, have an important role in maintaining Irish as the language of the community (Education Act (1998, p. 14).

## 2.2 Wales

According to the 2011 Census, Welsh is spoken by 562,000 speakers over the age of 3 years (Office for National Statistics, 2013). In both the Irish and the Welsh context, the majority of inhabitants speak English, with 97% of the inhabitants of Wales speaking either Welsh or English as their main language. The county of Gwynedd, known as the “heartland” of Welsh-speaking Wales (Lindsay, 1993, p.1), is home to the highest proportion of Welsh speakers (65.4%) – with various electoral divisions within the county varying between 18.6% in Menai (Bangor),<sup>4</sup> and 87.8% in Llanrug. The number of electoral divisions in Gwynedd

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<sup>4</sup> The Menai (Bangor) percentage is somewhat of an outlier due to the presence of Bangor University and the regional hospital. The majority of electoral divisions in Gwynedd (approx. 85%) reported over 50% of inhabitants able to speak Welsh, with 56% reporting over 70% of inhabitants able to speak Welsh.  
<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Welsh-Language/Census-Welsh-Language/welshspeakers-by-ediv-2011census>

where over 70% of the inhabitants were able to speak Welsh decreased from 59 in 2001 to 49 in 2011. Similarly, the number of electoral divisions where over 50% of inhabitants were able to speak Welsh decreased from 192 in 2001 to 157 in 2011. The region with the fewest speakers (7.8%) was Blaenau Gwent. Most counties offer Welsh-medium education opportunities, in many cases due to parental pressure groups (Thomas, 2010).

The Welsh Language Use Survey (2013-2015;<sup>5</sup> 2019-2020<sup>6</sup>) estimated that over 50% of adults aged 3 years and over who can speak Welsh use the language daily (56% in 2019-2020; 53% in 2013-2015), with a further 19% using it on a weekly basis. Data from 2013-2015 also revealed that as many as 94% of fluent Welsh speakers used Welsh on a daily (84%) or a weekly (10%) basis, with only 6% using it less often than that. Together, these estimates suggest that around 250,000 people use Welsh as a daily language. Nevertheless, the proportion of speakers among the whole population of Wales who are estimated to use the language daily (10% - Welsh Government, 2017) is fewer than the proportion of speakers within the population (19%). For that reason, Welsh Government (2017) published ‘Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers’ – an ambitious vision of reaching a million speakers of Welsh by 2050 and to double the proportion of speakers who use Welsh as a daily language.

### **3. Minority Languages in Primary Education**

Since Irish and Welsh exist both as an L1 of a speech community and as an L2 or an additional/new language for a large percentage of the population, the educational models

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<sup>5</sup> <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Welsh-Language/Language-Use-Surveys>

<sup>6</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2021/9/1/1632123984/welsh-language-use-wales-initial-findings-july-2019-march-2020.pdf>

on offer in both contexts reflect this autochthonous diversity (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006; Baker & Wright, 2021).

### 3.1 Ireland

Upon beginning primary education, children can learn Irish in a *Gaeltacht* school, in an Irish-medium school outside of the *Gaeltacht*, or as a subject only in English-medium schools. The vast majority of children (over 90%) learn Irish as a subject only in English-medium schools and are usually second or additional/new speakers of Irish. In 2021, the following numbers of primary schools on the island of Ireland were classified as Irish-medium education: 153 primary Gaelscoileanna, and 104 Gaeltacht schools in the Republic of Ireland, and 35 primary Gaelscoileanna in Northern Ireland (Gaeleoideachas, personal communication, September 7, 2021). Most children in Irish-medium schools are not native speakers of Irish, and there is a low number of children reporting having neither English nor Irish as a first language (DES, 2019)<sup>7</sup>.

There has been a recent change in recognition criteria for Gaeltacht schools as per the Policy on Gaeltacht Education (2017-2022). Schools must now apply for this status and agree to implement certain educational practices including total full immersion in the Irish language for the first two years of primary education. Interest in Irish-medium education has grown steadily since the 1970s and there is a keen interest in expanding the current provision (Ó Duibhir, 2018). Typically, full early immersion practices are a feature of Irish-medium education. Providing more partial immersion or dual language programmes, however, is an aspiration of the 20-Year Strategy for Irish (GOI, 2010).

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<sup>7</sup> Department of Education and Skills. 2019. “Gaelscoileanna – Pupils by Language” [Excel spreadsheet]. [statistics@education.gov.ie](mailto:statistics@education.gov.ie)

While there is a well-documented decline in children's achievement in Irish in English-medium schools (DES, 2022; Harris et al., 2006), efforts to increase exposure to Irish through extended core programmes, use of incidental Irish, or Irish-language units, however, have not been extensively implemented or evaluated. There is little data available regarding the extent of CLIL practices in primary schools currently (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015) but seven primary schools are involved in the 3-year government-supported CLIL programme for Physical Education<sup>8</sup>. Over 100 schools have self-selected to be involved in the *Gaelbhratach* scheme at both primary and secondary level whereby they are awarded a flag to recognise their efforts to promote Irish as a communicative language (Gaelbhratach, personal communication, September 7, 2021). Irish can be used for informal communication throughout the school day but examples collected from practising teachers indicate that some of this can be quite formulaic or focus on building receptive language only (Dunne, 2015).

In other minority language contexts, children receive structured support in the minority target language for a few hours during the school day e.g., in Catalan (Arnau & Vilai Moreno, 2013). In both Hawaii and New Zealand, role models of the target language and culture, particularly older members of the community, support teachers in their work in promoting the language (Ó Duibhir et al., 2015). The Language Assistants Scheme was founded in 1999 to strengthen Irish as a language of communication amongst primary children in the Gaeltacht (Ó Duibhir et al., 2020), similar to the *Athrawon Bro*<sup>9</sup> scheme in

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/e99ba7-minister-mchugh-announces-schools-selected-to-participate-in-content/>

<sup>9</sup> *Athrawon Bro* (Region/Area Teachers) is a Welsh language service, established in the 1970s, whereby peripatetic teachers support primary schools most notably to teach Welsh as a second/additional language.

Wales. No parallel scheme exists for Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht, however.

Exemptions can be granted from the study of Irish in English-medium schools. In 2019, the criteria changed and now principals can in consultation with parents/carers grant exemptions under the new circular, 0052/2019 (ROS, 2019) in a number of cases e.g., if the child has additional learning needs and has not responded well to interventions. Support and structured approaches to implementing effective inclusive language teaching are needed in the first instance as teachers display difficulty supporting children's progress in Irish (DES, Inspectorate, 2007). It should be noted that cognitive skills developed by bilingualism can also aid a child's general development (Bialystok, 2009). Challenges exist, however, in assessing competence in a minority language that is L1/L2 and in accessing psychological assessment and language support through the minority language (Barnes, 2021; Hickey, 2021; O'Toole & Hickey, 2013; Gathercole, Thomas & Hughes, 2008).

### 3.2 Wales

Welsh Government (2010, pp. 8-9)<sup>10</sup> acknowledges the heterogeneity of the linguistic modes of delivery that operate within the concept of 'bilingual provision' in Wales, and recognises that the linguistic achievements of individuals in receipt of a given type of bilingual provision will vary significantly (Lewis, 2008). According to Welsh Government (2019),<sup>11</sup> 23% of pupils across Wales were educated through the medium of Welsh in 2019. Within the four western counties – Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire – this percentage is much higher. Of the 468,398 pupils reported as enrolled in maintained

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<sup>10</sup> <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4248/1/100420welshmediumstrategyen.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/school-census-results-2019-764.pdf>

schools across Wales, this 23% amounts to 107,732, a small increase from the 106,474 reported in the previous year (Welsh Government, 2018<sup>12</sup>). A significant number of pupils are educated through the medium of English, but are exposed to Welsh as an L2. However, all children attending government-maintained schools in Wales are developing bilinguals and will require differentiated support.

Welsh Government (2007)<sup>13</sup> provides a detailed typology of the mediums of provision that are currently in effect across Wales. Currently, there are five categories in the Primary sector: Welsh-medium, dual stream, transitional (Welsh-medium with significant use of English), predominantly English-medium with significant use of Welsh, and predominantly English medium. Welsh-medium schools operate an immersion-type programme (see Ó Duibhir, 2018, and Tedick et al., 2011, for examples of immersion contexts) in the Foundation Phase (age 4-7 years), where all pupils experience the curriculum in Welsh, though there are challenges in integrating L1 and L2 speakers in preschool settings (Hickey, Lewis & Baker, 2014). Dual stream schools operate separate Welsh-medium and English-medium streams, with the linguistic outcomes for each group differentiated accordingly. Transitional schools operate a more bilingual approach in Key Stage 2 (age 7-11 years), but with greater weighing towards Welsh. Predominantly English-medium schools with significant use of Welsh differ from predominantly English-medium schools in that both Welsh and English are used in the teaching of up to 50% of the curriculum.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2018-12/180725-school-census-results-2018-en.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/defining-schools-according-to-welsh-medium-provision.pdf>

The longstanding presence of Irish in compulsory state education, and the more recent obligation to learn Welsh until age 16 at school (Jones & Jones, 2014) has increased the exposure to the languages amongst younger populations, with around 40% of the population identifying as speakers of Welsh or Irish within the education system (Office for National Statistics, 2004; Morris, 2010; CSO, 2016). There remains a continued concern, however, that young speakers are reluctant to use the language outside of the education context (Ní Thuairisg & Ó Duibhir, 2019; Thomas & Roberts, 2011; Morris, 2010). Being cognisant of these issues during ITE may help motivate student teachers to focus on specific types of strategies that can help learners increase their confidence when using the language (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ní Bhaoill, 2018).

#### **4. Minority Languages and Initial Teacher Education**

In both the Welsh and Irish contexts, primary teachers are generalist teachers rather than subject specialists. ITE is a space where teachers begin to develop their emergent professional identity as they engage in foundation studies in child development, learning theories, and teaching pedagogies. A core component of ITE in both contexts is classroom-based experiences, where student teachers make explicit links between theory and classroom practice (Freeman, 2018; Johnson, 1996).

Both contexts offer English-medium degree opportunities alongside opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh/Irish, as well as bilingual options in Wales. In the wake of a number of influential reports (Tabberer, 2013; Furlong, 2015; Donaldson, 2017) education in Wales has recently undergone large scale reform (Furlong et al., 2021), including the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales that is to be rolled out in September 2022 and a re-evaluation of the role of universities in ITE (Furlong, 2019). As part

of this reform, universities were subject to reaccreditation of all ITE courses via the Education Workforce Council (EWC), the result of which offers a new suite of courses, the first of which commenced in 2019. These new courses draw on the principle of research-informed pedagogy, encouraging educators' active engagement with research (Mutton & Burn, 2020; Aldous, Evans & Penney, 2022). In Ireland, the BEd programme through Irish was also established in 2019 and, at the time of writing, the first cohort of students on the new BA/BEd courses in Wales and in Ireland have not yet graduated. However, both contexts differ in terms of recruitment and support for Welsh/Irish language skills in ITE and in the qualifications required to obtain a position in a minority language school as outlined below.

#### 4.1 Ireland

To work as a primary teacher in Ireland requires a level 8 bachelor's degree (240 ECTS) or level 9 Professional Master in Education equivalent to 120 ECTS. There is no additional language qualification needed to work in an Irish-medium school. Although the number of student teachers admitted annually onto the BEd through Irish is small (circa 35), it is recorded as a popular first choice for Leaving Certificate students (Ní Dhonnchdha, 2021). Primary teachers continually report some insecurity with their own level of Irish (Harris, 2006; Dunne, 2019) and challenges in later recruiting teachers for Irish-medium schools have been highlighted (Máirtín, 2006). As such, the Teaching Council has highlighted the Irish language as an area of priority in ITE (2020). Students who enter the Bachelor of Education (Primary Teaching) must meet the minimum requirement of H4 (60-70%) in the higher-level course in Irish in the Leaving Certificate state examination, as well as minimum entry requirements in English and mathematics. There is a small number of acceptable

alternatives to a qualification in second level Irish<sup>14</sup>. Students who enter the Professional Master in Education must meet the Leaving Certificate minimum requirements and also obtain 65% or more in the European Certificate B1 Irish Oral examination. The Irish language syllabus for BEd/PME students is aligned with level B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2018). For students who opt to complete the BEd through Irish there is an additional language entry requirement of a H3 on a higher-level Irish exam paper (70-80%) and B1 on the European Certificate for the Irish language<sup>15</sup>. Primary teaching continues to be a popular choice of study and attracts applicants of high academic calibre (Darmody & Smyth, 2016). However, even highly proficient speakers of the language can be reluctant to identify as ‘Irish speakers’ because of their perceived difference to members of the traditional language community (Barry, 2020; Dunne, 2015; Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2018).

In the main student teachers engage in Irish modules in most or all of their years in ITE, though this is decided by individual centres of ITE. Additionally, student teachers undertake a learning period in the *Gaeltacht*, usually two fortnight periods. The focus on this learning period is on developing language and cultural awareness. As Ní Dhiorbháin and Ó Duibhir (2021) show continuous language support is needed throughout their teaching career. Pre-service teachers, despite being the most proficient speakers of the language nationally can have limited knowledge of common grammar rules or misunderstand certain rules, and have difficulty in explaining the actual mistake (Ní Dhiorbháin, 2018).

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<sup>14</sup> For information on entry requirements for the Professional Master in Education, see [2022-24\\_pme\\_primary\\_entry\\_requirements.pdf \(mie.ie\)](https://www.mie.ie/2022-24_pme_primary_entry_requirements.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> For more information on entry requirements see [Baitsiléir san Oideachas Trí Mheán na Gaeilge \(Bunmhúinteoir-eacagt\) - Marino Institute of Education \(mie.ie\)](https://www.marino.ie/Baitsiléir-san-Oideachas-Trí-Mheán-na-Gaeilge-Bunmhúinteoir-eacagt-Bunmhúinteoir-eacagt)

Reports from the Chief Inspector highlight the correlation between proficiency in Irish and effective teaching methodologies (2013; 2018; 2022). Proficiency in the target language is necessary to teach effectively, and teachers also need sound pedagogical knowledge, and methodologies that focus on structured, rich language development, whilst, at the same time, encouraging positive attitudes to learning Irish. Experiences in implementing CLIL during initial teacher education are effective in building student teachers' confidence (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ní Bhaoill, 2018) otherwise very proficient speakers may not be more likely to engage in these practices in their future career (Dunne, 2019).

#### 4.2 Wales

In order to enrol onto an ITE course in Wales, students need to demonstrate a minimum of a B grade in English or Welsh language or English or Welsh Literature at GCSE<sup>16</sup>, alongside a minimum of a B grade in mathematics GCSE, and a C grade in science GCSE. Wales offers a 3-year undergraduate BA course and a one-year PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate of Education), combining on-campus taught content with practical school-based experience. In all courses, students need to 'pass' the practical school-based experience in order to graduate with Qualified Teacher Status.

Currently, there is no clear definition set by Welsh Government or the Education Workforce Council as to the necessary conditions that constitute a Welsh-medium ITE course. Individual institutions are accredited separately based on their own local ITE curriculum. In terms of curriculum content, the amount and type of materials related to bilingual and minority language pedagogies, theories and practices will vary depending on staff expertise and space allocation within the ITE curriculum. In terms of practical

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<sup>16</sup> The statutory General Certificate of Secondary Education qualification for 15- to 16-year-olds

experiences, some students are placed in schools that match their medium of study, whereas others who are competent Welsh speakers are provided with experiences in Welsh-medium/bilingual and English-medium schools, regardless of their medium of study. There is no requirement for students who are Welsh-speaking to enrol onto a Welsh-medium ITE course where such a course is available meaning that there are many graduates who may not have gained first-hand experience of teaching through the medium of Welsh or who were prepared for the immersion education experience during ITE but who, nevertheless, can teach in Welsh-medium schools. According to the Annual Education Workforce Statistics for Wales (2021)<sup>17</sup> there are currently 11,641 registered teachers (33.5% of the entire workforce) who classify themselves as either fluent or fairly fluent in Welsh. However, only 9,429 (27.1% of the entire workforce) noted that they had been prepared to work, were currently working or had ever worked through the medium of Welsh, or felt confident in doing so. At the same time, recruitment to ITE programmes across Wales has declined steadily since 2007/2008 (Welsh Government, 2020).<sup>18</sup> Worryingly, only 60% of students who speak Welsh fluently opt to undertake Welsh-medium ITE.

These low numbers of enrolment pose a clear challenge to the successful transmission of Welsh through the school domain as echoed in other indigenous language contexts (Lampert et al., 2013,). Consequently, Welsh Government provides Welsh language support for teachers (Y Cynllun Sabothol)<sup>19</sup> and various regional consortia support teachers in

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/documents/research-and-statistics/annual-statistics-digest/762-ewc-statistics-digest/file.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-06/initial-teacher-education-september-2018-august-2019-628.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19303/1/140127-review-welsh-language-sabbatical-scheme-educational-practitioners-participant-experiences-2011-2012-en.pdf>

developing their confidence to use Welsh in the classroom (Parry & Thomas, 2021). New ITE courses include a programme of language support for ITE students. These programmes serve to support the development of Welsh skills (Welsh Government, 2019).<sup>20</sup> A Welsh Language Competency Framework for Teachers was developed and implemented in 2019, on a national scale, in partnership between the regional education consortia, ITE Partnerships, Sabbatical Scheme providers,<sup>21</sup> the National Centre for Learning Welsh, and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.<sup>22</sup> This framework is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and is used as a basis for the planning and implementation of a coherent and multi-layered ITE provision tailored for each student teacher according to their initial knowledge and skills in Welsh. This framework enables student teachers, when completing their ITE course, to identify progress and set targets in developing Welsh language skills against the relevant Professional Standard in the Professional Learning Passport.

## **5. Using a Collaborative Model to Identify Areas for Development in Minority Language ITE**

ITE centres are foundational entities where teachers begin to cultivate their professional identity and “foster the language development of future generations” (Dombrowski et al., 2014, pp. 120-121). Yet, there is very little research evidence that provides insights into the processes by which speakers of minority languages are prepared for the challenges of the minority language classroom (Dombrowski et al., 2014) or how to

<sup>20</sup> <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/19bc948b-8a3f-41e0-944a-7bf2cadf7d18/professional-standards-for-teaching-and-leadership-interactive-pdf-for-pc.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> This is a government-funded sabbatical arrangement for in-service teachers to receive intensive Welsh training over the course of a school year – see <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2021-03/evaluation-of-the-welsh-language-sabbatical-scheme-for-education-practitioners.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol supports Welsh language provision in Higher Education – see <http://www.colegcymraeg.ac.uk/en/>

help develop their emergent professional identity as immersion or bilingual education teachers (Leavy et al., 2018). Teaching in a minority language is a challenge (Cammarata & Haley, 2018), but it is a challenge that is shared across many regions of the world.

Being aware of our own and others' approaches to these challenges is one way to further support effective ITE provision in minority language contexts. Consequently, we engaged in a collaborative model – the co-teaching model (Murphy et al., 2014) – to reflect on our own experiences in Ireland and Wales and to identify areas where minority language provision in ITE courses could be further developed. Collaboration models involve a democratic approach to planning, teaching and assessing that involve sharing the perspectives of two or more practitioners whose varied experiences and expertise are valued equally (Murphy, McCullagh & Doherty, 2014). Rooted in a Vygotskian, social constructivist approach to learning (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), collaborative models draw on social learning as a means to fulfil learning potential. Co-teaching as a collaborative model has been used in primary schools and ITE (EiTTT, 2016; Murphy & Martin, 2015; Murphy et al., 2014) to enable teachers, lecturers and student teachers to work together to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess units of work. Co-planning is the first stage of this process and the recommendations below are a result of co-planning between the authors who both contribute to ITE.

### 5.1 Collaborative model: Process and outcomes

The authors met on three occasions to discuss their own practice. In the first meeting, they gave an oral description of ITE provision in their own contexts drawing on course descriptions, assessment criteria, and guidelines for graduate attributes. As language learning happens in context (Freeman, 2018) an understanding of each other's

sociolinguistic context was important. The following themes emerged as issues of relevance for both contexts:

- Language proficiency needs of student teachers to both teach the target language and teach through the target language
- Supporting and assessing primary school children's target language competence

The authors also shared two practices that are used in their host institutions – translanguaging and co-teaching – and discussed how these approaches could be adapted.

During their second meeting, the authors reflected on findings relating to best practice in other contexts. Consequently, some of the early themes identified were revised. The needs of teachers to both teach the language and to teach through the language was subdivided into encouraging active speakers of the language (cf. Oattes et al., 2018), and developing content and pedagogical knowledge (cf. Schulman 1987), to acknowledge that language proficiency is necessary but not sufficient to ensure high quality teaching of and/or through the target language.

In order to help inform future ITE planning, practical examples of how to develop bilingual strategies in the classroom – e.g., Cummins (2005) and Creese & Blackledge (2010) – were consulted and a fourth theme of flexible bilingual communication emerged.

Perspectives on translanguaging as a methodology and practice in other linguistic contexts were explored and its efficacy in a minority language context was examined. An additional theme that is also common to other jurisdictions beyond Ireland and Wales is the challenge in assessing competence in the minority language (Peltoniemi & Bergroth, 2020).

Acknowledging that guidance for both summative and formative assessment is critical to teachers' work, this theme was expanded to include inclusive language teaching and

practices that the teacher can draw on in their day-to-day teaching to identify, support and assess children's varied learning needs.

In the third meeting, the researchers reflected on the issues that emerged in both the local (meeting 1) and international (meeting 2) contexts, as well as approaches that are seen to be effective for minority language contexts in particular. Combining the outcomes of both meeting 1 and meeting 2, four specific areas were identified as areas for development within minority language ITE, which are outlined below.

**(i) Fostering an Awareness of the Future Language Community**

A key aim of minority language education is to create a community of future active speakers (DES, 2016). This emergent community of speakers comprises diverse individuals spanning L1 speakers, simultaneous bilinguals, L2 speakers, early bilinguals, late bilinguals, multilinguals and new speakers, to name but a few (see Wei, 2000, for a more detailed list). How children are best supported to succeed in English-medium, Welsh/Irish-medium, or bilingual settings will differ depending on their language background and proficiency, whilst the needs of L1 or highly proficient minority language speakers need to be given due consideration as they often get overlooked (Hickey, 2001; Ní Longaigh, 2016; Ní Shéaghda, 2010; Ó Duibhir et al., 2015; Lewis, 2003). We know from the psycholinguistic literature that bilinguals differ from monolinguals neurologically (Green & Kroll, 2019) and linguistically (Bialystok, 2010) and that their linguistic behaviours are influenced by a myriad of internal (e.g., psychological – attitudes, Miller, 2017; self-esteem, Chen et al., 2022) and external (e.g., linguistic dominance, Flege et al., 2002) factors. Yet, educationally, we often expect the same outcomes and achievements for all, irrespective of these obvious differences. Bilinguals have their own unique language journeys (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2017) and

linguistic profiles (Oller et al., 2007; Faltis, 2020) that require different approaches to teaching.

Within a minority language context in particular, understanding how non-linguistic factors impact on pupils' experiences of learning through a minority language is important, particularly the affective dimension since maintaining positive attitude is crucial for the revitalisation of minority languages (Dornyei, 2005). Course content at ITE, therefore, needs to address these broader issues surrounding bilingual education, drawing on evidence pertaining to contexts outside of their own, in order that teachers can cater for and understand the diverse bilingual population with whom they will work. Such an approach complements the views of Espa a et al. (2019), as expressed in Singleton and Flynn (2021, p. 8): "teacher training programmes must implement new theories of multilingualism which valorize the language practices of linguistic minority students". The extent to which this happens in various ITE contexts is currently unclear, but given the additional political, socio-political, historical and legal complexities surrounding minority languages, including these discussions in minority language ITE is all the more important.

## **(ii) Emphasising the Role of Content and Pedagogical Knowledge**

Through effective classroom-based practices, teachers offer rich, continuous linguistic experiences for the children and young people they teach that can lead to long-term, sustained engagement with language over time. In immersion-based classrooms, these practices are largely embedded in constructivist ideologies of language development that view language as being largely input driven (Gathercole, 2007). In the English-medium sector, such practices are geared more towards traditional methods of language teaching, treating minority languages as individual subjects rather than as mediums of

instruction. Student teachers need space in their curriculum to explore relevant concepts and theories and reflect on a range of pedagogical practices and how theory informs practice, and vice-versa. Consequently, ITE programmes should be designed in ways that develop student teachers' knowledge of theory and understanding of key concepts that drive such initiatives – how to define a bilingual and why it matters, bilingual/L2 acquisition, aims of bilingual education, language policies in education, bi/multilingual pedagogies, language learning pedagogies, and the application of bi/multilingual language research in education settings – and provide them with opportunities to evaluate the use of that knowledge in their own school-based practice (e.g., see Peltoniemi & Bergroth, 2020 for immersion; or Ball et al., 2015, for CLIL). Within the primary sector this necessitates a solid knowledge of the target language and its structures (Ní Dhiorbháin, 2018), and the confidence to be able to explain these same structures to others, as well as having a repertoire of strategies to encourage children to explore and use the grammatical structures (e.g., the *Bain Súp As!*<sup>23</sup> programme).

Once equipped with a solid theoretical foundation in issues relating to bilingualism, teachers need to be able to balance both the language and content learning objectives in any given lesson (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). Student teachers need to explore creative ways to develop content and pedagogical knowledge (Freeman, 2018; Ní Dhiorbháin, 2018; Schulman, 1987) alongside the experience of observing and implementing innovative teaching strategies during ITE – e.g., CLIL or content-based learning – in order that they can make sense of the theory (Johnson, 1996). Developing pedagogical and content knowledge can be a collaborative and dialogic process (He & Angel, 2018). Sharing the perspectives of

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<sup>23</sup> See [Bain Súp As! | COGG](#)

other student teachers of minority languages could enrich students' understanding of the nuances of their own context and of their role as advocates of the language and culture. Co-construction of materials, particularly around the more generic concepts relating to minority language acquisition and bilingualism across locations, could also lead to a rich resource database that could be adapted as necessary for respective contexts.

### **(iii) Inclusive Language Teaching and Assessment**

The new process for applying for an exemption from learning Irish, and the resultant increase in granting exemptions, has highlighted a lack of awareness of the benefits of bilingualism, especially for children with additional learning needs (Dunne, 2020). While exemptions do not exist for the Welsh language, there is a shared need to embed strategies for inclusive language teaching so that all children can enjoy and succeed to an appropriate level in language learning. Assessments for Welsh and Irish are not yet sufficiently developed to take into account the needs of the bilingual (Barnes, 2021; Hickey, 2021; Nic Aindriú et al., 2021; O'Toole & Hickey, 2013; Gathercole, Thomas & Hughes, 2008; Gathercole, 2013a, 2013b), and the reliance on English-language versions of these tests, or a simple translation, are not valid ways to address the complexity of bilingual development in a minority language. Appropriate diagnostic measures need to be in place so that teachers can design and implement effective teaching and educational interventions, and to be able to communicate children's progress to parents and others in the school community. Student teachers need an awareness of the range of needs in language teaching, and where experiences in immersion education differ from English-medium settings (Peltoniemi & Bergroth, 2020).

Heretofore, there has been an emphasis on differentiation to meet the diverse needs of children (Flood & Banks, 2021) but a focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) during ITE, and how these are applied in different linguistic contexts, could be more effective in helping student teachers design and implement inclusive language teaching that cater for specific learning needs but also are of help to the general school population.

#### **(iv) Flexible Bilingual Communication and Education**

Different models of bilingual teaching have existed in various regions of the world for many years (Baker & Wright, 2021). Despite the vast body of research evidence that supports the use of a speaker's L1 as a scaffold to support their L2 learning (Cook, 2001), immersion education contexts have typically delivered a monolingual approach to teaching (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Baker & Wright, 2021). This is likely linked to teacher's understanding of the importance of exposure time to the target language (Ó Broin, 2017), coupled with the knowledge that majority language use in interlanguage is often a precursor to language shift (Crystal, 2000; Hickey, 2009). However, as children progress through their education, schools naturally shift towards planned and unplanned juxtaposition of the dominant language, usually English, alongside the target language, particularly where there is a paucity of quality resources in the target language.

Teachers in minority language contexts are therefore regularly engaged in translanguaging – a pedagogical practice “in which bilinguals receive information in one language and then use or apply it in the other language” (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 464) and where teachers and learners “use bilingualism as a resource rather than ignore it or perceive it as a problem” (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 464). Translanguaging, in its original sense (see

Williams, 1994),<sup>24</sup> draws on established educational concepts, namely Vygotskian scaffolding (the use of a pupil's stronger language to support the weaker one) and prior knowledge (where knowledge and understanding gained via learning in the L1 is transferred over to the L2) (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). For that reason, it is important that teachers understand the concept of translanguaging (Faltis, 2020), and appreciate how translanguaging approaches differ across various language contexts and why (Singleton & Flynn, 2021). Essentially, student teachers need time during ITE to reflect on how to create separate spaces for the named languages while "softening the boundaries between them" (García & Lin, 2017, p. 126). This is all the more important when teachers feel uncomfortable with the concept of using the dominant societal language in a minority language context (Dunne, 2019; Jones & Lewis, 2014; Hall & Cook, 2012; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017), and want to develop deep processing skills in the target language (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). The scope to develop translanguaging and language awareness activities that include other languages apart from the dominant language should also be explored (Dunne, 2020). Student teachers require opportunities to learn about translanguaging, to experience this approach in their own learning and to reflect on how they might use this approach in primary classrooms (Freeman, 2018; García & Lin, 2017).

A challenge in both the Irish and Welsh education systems is the recruitment and retention of Irish- or Welsh-speaking teachers, and this is also true of ITE lecturers. Co-teaching is a potential strategy that can help teacher educators on minority language ITE programmes share their linguistic and pedagogical knowledge, as well as resources. Co-

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<sup>24</sup> Translanguaging as a concept has evolved from being a purely pedagogical approach to one that aims to allow bilingual individuals to deploy their unique linguistic behaviours without adherence to strict linguistic boundaries between languages. Whilst both concepts are relevant, the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool is more likely to achieve the goals of immersion education.

planning and co-creation of resources can help overcome some of the challenges of relying on resources in the majority language. Aspects of modules can be co-delivered, e.g., the Visual Arts lecturer introducing a new artistic concept, and the Irish-/Welsh-language lecturer leading a discussion about this could be implemented in the primary classroom. This approach could address some of the challenges in recruiting ITE staff and in the design of suitable resources and methodologies for ITE lectures.

## 6. Conclusion

Dealing with the diverse linguistic nature of bilinguals and their families, and of the wider communities where they live, is a core element of the teaching profession today and must hold a prominent position within any ITE course. It is vital that teaching approaches and strategies implemented within minority education contexts facilitate teachers' dual 'specialist' role (i) as stimulants of language learning (utilising the concept of education as a 'vehicle' for instilling the language in others) and (ii) as facilitators of life-long language use (utilising the concept of education as a 'tool' to develop confidence with language and developing language awareness skills). In order to do that, teachers need to be equipped with a sound awareness of the issues they will face in minority language contexts, and to be knowledgeable about the classroom strategies they can implement to address some of these issues as they unfold. For that reason, ITE programmes that draw upon rich, evidence-based practice, tried and tested in various linguistic contexts, can help support student teachers in executing their dual roles effectively. Sharing good practice across regions would further help enrich children's experiences, foster collaboration, and nurture innovative practice among teachers and student teachers.

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