



University  
of Glasgow

Crichton, H. and Templeton, B. (2010) *An evaluation of the partial immersion project at St. Aloysius college junior school*. Project Report. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/44831>

Deposited on: 7 February 2011



University  
of Glasgow

**An Evaluation of the Partial Immersion  
Project at St. Aloysius College Junior  
School**

Hazel Crichton & Brian Templeton

May 2010

## St Aloysius Bilingual Partial Immersion Project

### **Background**

This is a report of an evaluation of a bilingual partial immersion project initiated with a class in St. Aloysius Junior School in 2009 as a pilot which was extended to two classes in school session 2009-10<sup>1</sup>. This evaluation was commissioned by the school with a view to assessing the impact, if any, the project is having on the pupils.

St Aloysius is an independent Jesuit Catholic school situated in the centre of Glasgow. It was established almost 150 years ago and is proud of its Jesuit tradition of academic excellence and the service to others which is shared by a world-wide network of Jesuit schools and universities. In 2008 the school was approached by the Italian Consul who proposed the setting up of a partial immersion class, funded and resourced by the Consulate through the provision of additional staffing. The school was chosen because of its international links and its situation in Glasgow where there is a large Italian community, which is also evident within the school.

The partial immersion model that the Consul proposed was a variation on a full immersion model which has been successfully adopted in several European countries, among them France, Spain, Switzerland, Greece and Germany. In St. Aloysius a number of curricular areas, including expressive arts and social subjects are taught through the medium of Italian by a native Italian teacher for two hours every day. The rest of the day, the children are taught by their class teacher in English. The project at St. Aloysius is the first to be initiated in an established school; as stated above, there are similar Italian projects in other countries but they have been in schools set up as bilingual schools from their inception. The Italian government sees the funding of such projects as an investment in better relationships between their country and others and as a way to promote Italy's strong cultural heritage.

Responding to an innovative initiative for a school such as that proposed by the Consul General requires a great deal of consideration by all those involved. There was much discussion between the school and the Italian Consulate as to what form the

---

<sup>1</sup> The two classes in the project will be referred to in this report as the 'bilingual classes'; those classes in the same year group who are taught wholly in English will be referred to as the 'non-bilingual' classes.

project would take and the amount of time that would be given over to teaching in Italian. The school sought to involve parents in the consultative process as early and as much as possible. Parents of children in P1<sup>2</sup> and P2 were invited to a series of information evenings and asked whether they would be interested in placing their children in a bilingual partial immersion class. A sizeable proportion of parents was very positive, so much so that the school had to hold a ballot for places in the Italian class and subsequently decided to create a second class. A pilot was set up in January 2009 with a P1 class in which they were taught Italian two hours per week. In August 2009 most of the children in the pilot, now in P2, continued with the full Italian partial immersion, that is, two hours per day, and a P3 class following the same principles was started. There are 18 pupils in each class.

This evaluation of the first year of the bi-lingual partial immersion project in the early years of St. Aloysius College Junior School was conducted for two principal reasons. Firstly, the school was concerned to ensure that, despite a sizeable proportion of their learning taking place in Italian, the children in the bilingual classes were not disadvantaged in terms of academic progress in key areas such as English, Literacy and Mathematics. Secondly, there was a desire to assess the impact on the children who are in the Italian classes in terms of positive or negative attitudes and overall progress in key skills such as problem solving and interpersonal communication. Other considerations related to the desirability or not of continuation of the project.

This report will be structured as follows:

Following on from this introductory overview of the background to the project and the rationale leading to its implementation, a short review of the research and professional literature on the subject of bilingual and immersion schooling will be presented in order to provide a context for the project. The review of the literature will be followed by details and analysis of evidence gathered from observations of the two bilingual classes. There will then follow analyses of the data collected from interviews with samples of children in the bi-lingual classes, parents of children in both bilingual and non-bilingual classes, class teachers and senior management figures of the Junior School. Results of specialised tests which measure mathematics,

---

<sup>2</sup> P1 refers to children in the first year of primary education, aged between 4-6; P2 to the second year of primary education; P3 to the third year of primary education and so on.

literacy, developed ability and attitudes administered to the whole P2 and P3 cohort, bilingual and non-bilingual will then be presented, before the presentation of conclusions and recommendations.

### **Review of the relevant literature**

There are a number of varieties of immersion or bilingual schooling. In true 'bilingual' schools, such as those in Vienna, there are roughly equal numbers of pupils who are native speakers, or fluent in each language in each class and most classes are taught by two teachers, one a native speaker of German and the other a native speaker of the other target language, usually English, using both languages. For more detail of this type of education see Crichton (2006). In immersion programmes, which are particularly popular in Canada where they are offered in almost all the Anglophone provinces, children whose first language is not French, for example, are taught almost exclusively in that language by native speaker teachers or ones who are highly proficient in the language.

In Scotland there are immersion programmes in Gaelic in almost 60 primary school classes, mostly in the North and West and there are two full immersion schools, one primary and one 'all through' comprising primary and secondary provision in Glasgow. Johnstone et al. (1998) conducted an evaluation of Gaelic medium education in the primary school which found that Gaelic medium educated children were performing at least as well educationally compared to their English medium educated counterparts; standardised national tests showed that the Gaelic medium educated children actually performed better in mathematics and in tests of written English.

In partial immersion programmes, such as the one in St. Aloysius, children receive education in different curricular areas for a set time per day in the foreign language. A partial immersion programme in French at Walker Road Primary School in Aberdeen which continued for over seven years received similar evaluations to those of Gaelic medium educated pupils in terms of pupils' attainment in the key skills of English, Environmental Studies and Mathematics (Johnstone & McKinstry, 2008). The French immersion pupils also 'demonstrated markedly greater fluency, range and confidence' (p. 13) in speaking, reading and writing in English. Johnstone and McKinstry also

suggest that children in immersion programmes have the additional benefits of greater awareness of international citizenship compared to non-immersion pupils.

It appears from research in the Scottish immersion context that children receiving immersion or partial immersion education are not disadvantaged by the experience; indeed, there seem to be noticeable advantages in terms of their English literacy development and greater confidence as well as the 'value-added' factor of fluency in another language. These findings resonate with results of research in other parts of the world. Research studies into immersion and partial immersion programmes in schools consistently produce results which indicate that the youngsters in such programmes perform as well as and sometimes better in some areas than their non-immersion peers (Swain & Lapkin 1991, Met, 1993).

Recent research in California states: 'Study after study has reported that children in bi-lingual programs typically outperform their all-English counterparts on tests of academic achievement in English. Or, at worst, they do just as well' (Krashen & McField, 2005: 7). Further support for the claims above has been offered by Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, (2000) whose findings showed that in studies conducted over a period of thirty years, children in bi-lingual immersion programmes performed as well or better than their non-immersion peers in standardised measures of mathematics and English (Fortune & Teddick, 2003)

There are claims linking enhanced cognitive control and bilingualism, particularly in tasks which require control of attention and cognitive flexibility (Sorace, 2009). According to Sorace, the brain's ability to deal with two languages means that bilinguals are better able to multi-task. Van de Craen, a Belgian academic, asserts that scans of bilingual children's brains and of those educated bilingually show they need to expend less effort when performing tasks of reasoning (Van de Craen et al., 2007) and recommends that children should be given the opportunity at as young an age as possible to experience bi- or multilingual education.

Some parents may express concern about the possibility of confusion between the two languages and 'code-switching' or 'language mixing'. However, it appears that language mixing is seen as normal when children are exposed to more than one

language but does not mean that they are confused or do not know the difference between the languages (Sorace & Ladd, n.d.) and may be considered a sign of mastery of both (Lanza 1997).

One issue which appeared in the studies of immersion schooling in the Canadian context is that the pupils' expressive skills, that is, speaking and writing in the foreign language, were not so highly developed as the passive skills, such as understanding and reading. This was evident usually in areas where the children did not have the chance to interact with native speakers outside the classroom, (Johnson & Swain, 1997). Findings relating to the Gaelic immersion pupils stated that the levels of written Gaelic were not as high as the children's levels of spoken and reading understanding of Gaelic might have indicated (Johnstone, 1999).

In conducting a review of the literature in order to provide a context for the study, we were surprised to find that there seemed very few studies which identified disadvantages to bi-lingual immersion programmes. Those which did tended to focus on practicalities such as finding suitable accommodation or qualified teachers. However, as Johnstone and McKinstry (2008) highlight, 'Success in immersion depends on key factors such as high-quality teaching, sound planning, continuity from one year to the next, a supportive ethos and good links with parents' (p.1). The next section of this evaluation will report the findings of the research to ascertain whether the first year of the bilingual partial immersion project can be considered a success or not.

### **The Observations:**

Two days were set aside for the observations of the two bilingual classes. The classes were observed taking part in 'normal' activities, which will be described in detail below. The Italian teacher wore a radio microphone which was linked to an audiotape recorder, which recorded her utterances and the majority of the children's language. Full field notes were also taken so that as clear a picture as possible of what was happening in the classes could emerge. The observation of the P2 class will be described below, followed by that of the P3 class before concluding this section of the report by reflecting on what the observations might mean.

## **P2 Observation**

In the P2 class the two hour session was conducted by the teacher almost entirely in Italian. The first part of the session appeared to be designed to reinforce the children's prior learning. The children started with a familiar Italian song, before an interactive question and answer session where children practised greetings and personal information and told the teacher the day, date and weather in Italian so that she could display it to the class. The teacher chose an 'assistant' from the children, who had to wear a special cap with Italian colours, who helped to distribute and collect materials. This is a regular feature of the lesson in both classes; the choice of 'assistant' is made on the basis of gender, alternating boy, girl, each day. The children appeared keen to be chosen. The teacher then took the children through a language drill, reinforced through the use of song, on the sounds of vowels and the alphabet in Italian. The next activity involved the children writing numbers, colours and the names of fruits in Italian on individual white boards.

In the next phase of the lesson the teacher read the children a story about a child visiting her grandmother on her birthday and appeared adept at relating parts of the story to songs and previous learning in Italian with a variety of active learning strategies which ensured that the children did not disengage. Children were also encouraged to contribute to the story in Italian through cues, such as ending sentences or describing what they saw in the pictures. New vocabulary relating to birthday gifts such as 'fiori', 'cioccolatini' and 'profumo' was reinforced by an action game.

After the interval the children were occupied in an activity where they had to draw party clothes, linked to the story of the birthday, and decorate them with a variety of ornamentation: feathers, glitter, sequins, coloured cloth and paper and so on. The teacher moved around the class helping and talking to the children in Italian as they worked. In terms of language development, it was clear that the children were able to respond appropriately in Italian to targeted questions fluently and readily, although they often answered in English to less familiar questions. This class has a Learning Assistant who was fully involved in the lesson and contributed herself in Italian, making the immersion more 'real'. The children's accents appeared very 'authentic'.

## **P3 Observation**

The P3 class has not had as much exposure to Italian as the P2 class who had been involved in the pilot for six months previous to the project starting and they therefore appeared to need slightly more help provided by visual stimulus displayed in the classroom and some teacher translation to respond in Italian. Nonetheless, the teacher used very little English, only resorting to it on occasion as a final option. The session started in the same way as the P2 class, with the choice of an ‘assistant’ and revision and reinforcement of previously learned vocabulary and structures. This was achieved through the medium of song and interactive questioning. The teacher then moved on to one of the topics the class was studying in environmental studies, the Egyptians. This part of the session started with a visual presentation and discussion led by the teacher in Italian about hieroglyphs. The pupils were shown how to relate different letters to hieroglyphs and then had to decode a number of Italian words written in hieroglyphs before creating their own. While they were working, the teacher moved round the classroom interacting with the children in Italian as she had done with the P2 class. Although a lot of the children answered her in English, it was clear, as in the P2 class, that they had had no difficulty understanding, despite the fact that the teacher appeared to be speaking at normal speed.

The third part of the session started with a song with actions, before revisiting the colours in Italian through an interactive presentation about Carnevale and the different costumes that children might wear for the occasion. Children were invited to participate, pointing to the correct colour and naming the colours they could see. The children were also encouraged to use ‘si mi piace’ and ‘non mi piace’ in discussion about whether they liked the different costumes displayed in the presentation. Once again, the children appeared fully engaged and it was striking how much like native speakers they sounded. Given that the children in this class had had barely six months of partial immersion in Italian the level of understanding and the contributions they were able to make in Italian were very impressive.

### **Some reflections on the observations**

The observation of both classes allowed us to see the Italian project ‘in action’ and appreciate what the children were experiencing. The overall impression from the observation was that the children in both classes appeared at ease hearing the Italian teacher speaking Italian; there seemed no evidence of misunderstandings or stress

from being spoken to and having to respond in a different language. When addressing the whole class, the teacher generally spoke at slightly slower than normal speed, slowing further when using particularly long or seemingly complex language or vocabulary. She generally used English very occasionally to reinforce her meaning, usually when giving instructions, for example, 'una parola, one word' or 'cancellate la lavagna, clean your board', but normally supported her Italian with body language and visual aids very effectively so that the children had little difficulty in grasping meaning. When she interacted with the children individually as she moved round the tables checking their work, she spoke in Italian at seemingly normal speed. The pupils then mostly answered in English, although their responses indicated that they had understood perfectly. In teacher/whole class interaction in Italian the teacher was very skilled at including all children in her questions and used elicitation to good effect.

In both classes there is a lot of teaching and learning achieved through actions and song; the children seemed to have a song for every topic they had studied, such as numbers, alphabet, phonic sounds, days of the week etcetera, and they appeared to enjoy singing. They had also started writing Italian words and appeared comfortable doing so. There seemed to be a slightly greater focus on the structure of the language with the P3 class, for example, the teacher explicitly drew children's attention to adjective agreement, although with just one session per class for comparison, no generalisation can be made.

As stated above the children all demonstrated clear understanding of the Italian the teacher used to interact with them as a class and as individuals. The Italian used by the children in both classes was impressive not only in the range of things they could say at the stage they were at in learning the language, but also because of the native speaker-like quality of their accents. A difference in the 'Scottish' and 'Italian' teaching styles was also noticeable. The children stayed in the same classroom with both the Italian teacher and the class teacher but there was a different ambience apparent which, although difficult to support with hard evidence, was definitely conspicuous, as if the children had been transported to an Italian classroom. The Education Officer at the Consulate, herself an ex-primary school head teacher, stated that one of the aims of the project was 'cultural' immersion as well as immersion in the language. Her view was that the Italian system lays greater emphasis on building

relationships and skills in the early stages than the Scottish system which she felt gave more importance to learning. However, as stated in the introduction, the intention was to combine the best of both systems, with the children's wellbeing and progress the main focus. The atmosphere in both classes appeared very positive and it seemed clear that the children were enjoying the experience.

### **Interviews with the children**

Having observed the children in class the next step was to interview a sample of them to find out how they felt about being in the bilingual class and learning Italian. A random sample from each class, comprising three boys and three girls was selected and these pupils were interviewed as a class group and their responses recorded on audio tape. The questions were designed to be open and non-leading, to avoid the possibility that the children might try to accommodate any implicit messages the interviewers transmitted through their use of language in the question. This section of the report features a number of typical quotes from the children, so that the reader may 'hear' their views as they expressed them themselves.

When asked what they thought of being in the class, all the children said they liked being in a bilingual class:

*'It's exciting because I get to learn new stuff'*

*'I love all the stuff we do and all the activities we do'*

They were also positive about what they had learned so far, although judgement of their progress varied:

*'I'm doing quite good in Italian'*

*'I know thousands!'*

When asked if they found it confusing to be taught in both languages at different parts of the day, roughly half of the P2s said they got mixed up occasionally. However, the P3s seemed more confident, with only one child stating that he sometimes got mixed up:

*'I sometimes get mixed up a little bit'*

*'It's not confusing, it's easy'*

*'I don't get mixed up'*

A number of the children mentioned links with Italy, either through family or from holidays:

*'My dad's Italian and I can talk to him in Italian'*

*'My mum and daddy are Italian. I get to go to Italy every single summer'*

*'I like most of the language ... because my family's religion is Italy'*

The presence in each class of children who have some prior knowledge of Italian may be considered a positive advantage for those children who have no previous experience in the language. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory of learning (1978) refers to the 'more knowledgeable other' who can help learners develop skills by providing a greater knowledge base upon which the less knowledgeable can draw and use to progress. The 'more knowledgeable other' is often regarded as the teacher, but in the classroom more proficient children often provide valuable peer support. More information about Vygotskian theory can be found in Wertsch and Sohmer (1995).

The children said they had no difficulty understanding the Italian teacher because of strategies used to aid comprehension:

*'If I don't understand, I can look at the pictures on the wall and see what they are in Italian'*

*'If we don't understand, she says it in English'*

When asked what they particularly liked about being in the Italian class, most of the children mentioned the activities they did, with some insightful comments:

*'I like it because when we play games it also includes what you learn'*

*'The best part about it is that we can speak two languages'*

When asked what they did not like about being in the Italian class the children found it difficult to identify anything, the only negative comment coming from a child who found number work difficult. One child seemed concerned that she might be moved out of the class if she became too proficient:

*'It's not very good for me, because when I get very very good at Italian I won't be able to stay in the class any more. I love Italian!'*

All the children said they wanted to continue in the Italian class, but also showed enthusiasm for learning other languages:

*'I would like to learn to speak Spanish'*

*'I think I would want to speak three different languages'*

It was clear from their overwhelmingly positive responses that the children enjoyed being in the Italian class and felt they were making good progress, both in Italian and in other areas of the curriculum. They also showed awareness of Italian cultural aspects, mentioning Leonardo da Vinci, Monte Bianco and Carnevale. They enjoyed being able to communicate with native speakers, in Scotland and in Italy. They also demonstrated awareness of other cultures and languages and did not see any barriers to learning about them. It may be that they had been unconsciously influenced by parental attitudes, but their enthusiasm spoke for itself. The next step was to interview parents about their decision to place their children in a bilingual class and how they viewed their progress. It was also considered important to speak to parents who had decided not to place their children in a bilingual class, so that a balance of perspectives could be offered.

### **Interviews with the parents**

A random sample of parents was selected, six from each of the bilingual classes and three from each of the non-bilingual classes. The interviews were conducted by telephone and notes taken of the parents' responses. We would like to thank all those parents who gave their time to respond so willingly and fully. At the start of the interview all the parents were asked how they had found out about the bilingual proposal and whether they thought the school had provided clear information about it. This question will be addressed first, followed by the responses of the parents of the bilingually educated children. The responses of the parents of the children in the 'normal' classes will then be presented.

The majority of parents thought that the school had provided clear information about what was involved in the bilingual project. As stated in the introduction, when approached by the Italian Consul General, the school informed parents without delay of the possibility of a bilingual class in order to gauge the level of potential parental support. Perhaps the fact that the school informed parents immediately about the

prospect of the introduction of a partial immersion class, contributed to a feeling that a number of parents expressed that the school itself did not have a great deal of information to impart, since they were dependent on the Italian Consulate for information. Most were certain that the school had provided as much detail as they could, however, three parents felt that the information for parents had been unclear with one saying that it had been a 'bit muddled at the beginning' and another 'poorly handled'.

### **Interviews with parents of children in the bilingual classes**

The parents were asked why they had chosen to place their child in a bilingual class. The main reason given was that they felt that it was a good opportunity for their child to learn another language. Two parents cited research indicating wider educational and cognitive benefits of early bilingualism. One parent said that her child was quite reserved and she thought that an additional language would be beneficial for self-confidence. Three parents had links with Italy, two were clear that they would have chosen a bilingual class no matter what the language, the other said they had chosen it only because it was Italian.

The parents were then asked how they felt now about the decision to place their child in a bilingual class. All expressed themselves very happy with no regrets whatsoever about their decision. When asked if their child appeared to be coping with a large part of their learning taking place in Italian, all appeared satisfied that they were performing at least as well as their peers in the non-bilingual class. Although two parents mentioned that their children needed some reinforcement in numbers, in general the feeling was that the progress in the key skills of English and Mathematics (which are taught in English) had not been affected. One parent stated that her child was a changed person with much more confidence and greater understanding across the board. One parent commented that her child had seemed more tired than usual for the first six weeks or so of the project, however, all felt that there had been no adverse effects on their children's learning and praised the school and the class teachers for their diligence in ensuring that their children had made such good progress in all areas of the curriculum.

The parents all said that their children spoke some Italian or talked about what they had learned in Italian at home. Outside the home some of them take the initiative and speak to Italian restaurant, café and delicatessen personnel or with Italian children and families at church, which may be an indication of increased confidence in communicating at an interpersonal level.

When asked if there was anything they wanted to add that had not been asked, most parents underlined how pleased they were with the progress their children were making, not just in Italian but also in other areas of the curriculum and how much they hoped the bilingual partial immersion would continue.

### **Interviews with parents of children in the non-bilingual classes**

When asked why they had decided not to place their child in a partial immersion class the parents of the children in the non-bilingual classes cited a variety of reasons. The majority of parents interviewed said they had made the decision based purely on the language offered. Had the language been French or Spanish they would have been much more likely to have considered opting to place their child in a bilingual class. A number of these parents stated that they did not think Italian was relevant for their child since they themselves had no Italian connections or plans to visit Italy; another felt that Italian was not a ‘world language’ and therefore less useful for future professional and leisure opportunities than some others.

Some parents were concerned that learning another language would be too much for their child, especially at such a young age when basic skills have to be mastered. One parent, whose child had started in the bilingual class, had made the decision to withdraw as the child had ‘hated’ it and her feeling was that progress in other areas of the curriculum had suffered. A number of parents were concerned that learning Italian might prove a distraction from the important development of their children’s skills in English and Mathematics. One parent felt that foreign language projects such as this were ‘too innovative’ and would be better offered outwith school hours.

All the parents were very satisfied with their decision. They felt that their children were progressing very well and had no regrets in opting out of the bilingual project. However, two parents thought it important to mention that friendship groups had been

disrupted when the bilingual classes had been set up and spoke of the negative effect on their children when their friends had moved to the bilingual class and other children moved into 'their' class.

Both sets of parents expressed themselves happy with their decision to place their child or not in a bilingual class. All parents were very supportive of the school and the majority expressed appreciation that the staff had been as accommodating as possible so that their children were not disadvantaged in any way, no matter which class they were in.

### **Interviews with the teachers**

The Italian teacher and the two class teachers were interviewed and their responses audio recorded. We would like to thank the teachers for their time and their openness in responding so fully to our questions. An account of the interview with the Italian teacher will follow; thereafter the two class teachers' responses will be reported.

### **Italian Teacher**

The Italian teacher already had teaching experience in Scotland, but not in a bilingual setting. She was very enthusiastic about the progress the children had made in Italian in such a short time and expressed the view that they did not seem to have to make any effort to communicate in Italian as they appeared to accept it as the natural language when she was in the class. At the beginning of the project, she was aware that the shyest children did not interact but she felt that all the children now were comfortable with the language, their understanding was very good and their speaking was progressing well.

Her feeling was that the P2s were slightly more confident in Italian than the P3s, possibly because they had had six months of Italian teaching before the project began and therefore the language was more easily consolidated. Another possibility might be that the P3s had a more advanced level of English language, leading to greater awareness of differences between the two languages. Her opinion was that as a general rule, it was better to start in P2. However, she made it clear that the P3s' Italian was developing very well and she was happy with their progress. She had recorded both classes singing an Italian song and had played it to Italian nationals,

who had been unable to distinguish that the children were not Italian, because their accents were so authentic.

The Italian teacher's key priority was the wellbeing of the children and for this reason she said she sometimes used more English than she would like, so that they would not feel insecure. However, she had given a lot of thought to resources and employed a great deal of visual material to aid understanding. The ideal situation, she felt, would be if the class teachers had some Italian so that she could remain speaking in Italian with any support being provided by the class teacher in English. In the P2 class the Classroom Assistant had taken a course in Italian and was able to assist the children if there appeared any difficulties in understanding.

The Italian teacher found that the production of specialist resources very time-consuming and the work with the children very intense, however, she said that the rewards in seeing the children's progress made her very keen that the project should continue.

### **Class teachers**

The teachers of both the P2 and the P3 classes were interviewed together; as the project was a new experience for both, we considered that any issues raised would be common to both, which appeared to be the case as the interview progressed. Both teachers had experience teaching at P2 and P3 level, and although non-Italian speakers were able to operate in a range of other languages. When asked about the project their overall assessment was positive, but they stated they had had to face a number of challenges, the main one being a perceived lack of time to teach the core curriculum with less follow-up time for consolidation. Both felt under pressure to stay at the same level as the non-bilingual class in the year and both highlighted some practical issues regarding planning.

Normally, with two classes in each year group, the teachers of the two classes plan together. With the introduction of the bilingual project, the class teachers of the bilingual classes felt that the unusual and innovative nature of the project had meant that they had to take decisions individually about the content and structure of lessons without the security of collaboration with their peers. Planning with the Italian teacher

was initially problematic, because of the time dislocation; when they were free, she was teaching and vice-versa. However, both stated that it was good to plan together with the Italian teacher to divide the teaching of topics and provision of resources more effectively. The P3 teacher in particular had made a great deal of effort to improve the planning process, so that in time it has become much better.

When asked about any effects that they perceived on the children, both teachers stated that they thought the children became more tired more quickly than a 'normal' class at that stage, due to the attention needed to listen to the Italian and this 'tiredness' led to occasional issues with concentration. However, they made it clear that the overall progress of the children did not appear to be affected and were of the opinion that the children in the bilingual classes were working at similar levels to previous cohorts at that particular time. The P2 teacher mentioned occasional Italian interference in the vowel sounds when children were doing focused work on reading and spelling. In P3, where the children have a greater awareness of the English language, interference was not an issue. Both said that the children always made routine classroom requests such as requests to go to the toilet or get a drink in Italian and both said they had picked up quite a lot from the children's use of Italian words and phrases.

The consensus of both teachers was that the children enjoyed the Italian sessions and were experiencing no major difficulties in any area of the curriculum. They felt that the children were at the same level as their peers in the non-bilingual class, but they themselves had had to put a great deal of effort into ensuring the children's progress in core subjects. Both felt that the project should continue, but perhaps occupy less time in the day, perhaps one hour instead of two, so that they could have more time to work with the children. The P2 teacher also stated that the children had less time for cooperative learning and that teaching styles had had to be quite limited due to the pressure felt to cover the core work.

All the teachers were appreciative of the support they had received from the management of the school. The next section of this report provides an account of the interview with two senior managers of the Junior School, the Head Teacher and the Head of Early Years.

### **Interview with Head of Junior School and Head of Early Years**

The Head of Junior School and the Head of Early Years were interviewed together and their responses audio recorded. As the project was targeted at P2 and P3 children, both had worked closely together from its inception. We would like to thank both managers for taking time from their extremely busy schedules, not only to answer our questions, but also for their availability and assistance throughout the time that we were involved in the evaluation. They provided information about the background to the project, much of which has already been reported in the introduction. Having discussed the offer from the Italian Consulate at length together with the Head Teacher and after having done research into the benefits or otherwise of bilingual partial immersion programmes, both felt that the proposed project would be a very good opportunity for the children and would move the school forward. The next step was to inform parents about the possibility of a partial immersion class being created. Their impression was that the project seemed to polarise the parents with some having strong feelings for it and others equally strong feelings against it going ahead. They felt the main reasons for parents opting not to put their children forward for the project could be grouped into three main categories:

- The range of specialist teacher input in a number of areas, for example Art, Music, Drama would not be available to children in the bilingual class as these were areas which would be taught in Italian
- Parents were concerned that children would be separated from their friends
- A project such as this runs counter to the traditional education perceived to be offered by St. Aloysius

Nonetheless, the positive response of so many parents surprised them and it was decided to set up a second class for P3 children after the pilot. After the pilot, five parents removed their children from the bilingual class. Reasons for doing so varied, but it appeared that the majority, while happy for their children to have Italian one afternoon a week, did not want to commit them to such an intensive programme. Both managers felt that it was crucial that parents should have the choice of opting in or out of a bilingual class and respected their reasons for not doing so.

When asked about the management of such an innovative undertaking, both the Head of Junior School and the Head of Early Years said it had cost a huge amount of work and energy, as they had been determined from the outset that the Italian project should not be considered as taking precedence over any of the other activities and initiatives in which a busy school such as St. Aloysius is involved. A lot of time and energy had gone into supporting the Italian teacher who felt the pressure of the success of the project to be her responsibility alone. Both managers were very appreciative of the support given to the Italian teacher by members of the teaching and support staff in the Junior School. Although staff were not able to provide support in terms of professional advice since the project was such a new initiative, of which no one had experience, they provided emotional encouragement which was seen as invaluable.

Support also had to be given to the class teachers who had to deal with issues of ownership of the class and who required reassurance about their role in ensuring the children's progress. Both managers were aware that the class teachers felt insecure and had endeavoured to reassure them as much as possible. When planning the project, it was envisaged that the forty per cent of the class teachers' timetable which was freed up when the Italian teacher taught the class would be used to take forward initiatives which would benefit the whole school. This year, possibly because of the novelty of the situation and the adjustments the class teachers felt they had to make, development work of this sort had been less than anticipated. Next year it is hoped that as staff will be more experienced in working in the bilingual environment, they will be able to deliver greater output during this extra time which benefits the whole school community. Both managers were also aware that effective planning was difficult to organise due to the dislocation of the Italian teacher's and the class teachers' free time.

The Head of Junior School and the Head of Early Years both said that having been closely involved in the project from the beginning, they had become even more sensitive to the importance of building and maintaining good relationships not only between themselves and members of staff and parents, who are crucial to the success of such an undertaking, but also the importance of ensuring positive relationships between all members the staff.

When asked how they thought the children were coping, both the Head of Junior School and the Head of Early Years were certain that they were coping very well. The progress of all children in the Junior School is monitored rigorously and there appears to be no difference in the progress of the children in the bilingual and non-bilingual classes in core skills. It was suggested that the children in the bilingual classes might have enhanced confidence and self-esteem and be more adaptable due to the difference in teaching styles between the class teachers and the Italian teacher. Although a potential source of conflict initially, as the boundaries set on perceived behavioural issues, for example, were different, the children very quickly adapted and after a period of about three to four weeks were able to move seamlessly from one 'culture' to another.

The issue of culture seems to be an important factor in the bilingual project. One of the aims of the project was that the children should not only achieve mastery of the Italian language, but that they should also, through immersion in the 'microcosm' of an 'Italian' classroom with the Italian teacher, become familiar with the type of body language, attitudes and ambience that are evident in Italian culture and the emphasis on affective relationships prevalent in Italian primary schools. Both managers said it was very beneficial for the children to experience the cultural context as well as the language. The observations confirm the difference in ambience within the 'Scottish' and the 'Italian' classroom.

Both the Head of Junior School and the Head of Early Years felt that they and the school had benefited from the experience and said they would be happy to share their experiences and expertise gained from planning and managing the project, not only with schools which may be considering similar moves, but also with wider learning communities in the national arena where interest may be shown. Both felt that they now knew a lot more about the whole subject of bilingual immersion schooling because of the research they had conducted so that they could inform parents knowledgeably. Both also felt that they had a greater understanding of teaching methodologies. Before the project had started, they had already made changes to the way French is delivered in the Junior School, so that the children get less input at a time, but more frequently in the week. In future modern languages teaching and learning cultural aspects relating to the foreign language and lifestyles in countries

where the language is spoken will occupy an important role. They are also keen to introduce Spanish as a second or third foreign language. It is envisaged that the children in the bilingual class will start to learn French in the later stages of primary education, probably P6, so that they will be prepared for Senior School modern languages. At the moment, no decision has been made about Italian provision in the Senior School, although there are a number of options which are being explored.

### **Results of InCAS (Interactive Computerised Assessment System) tests**

The children in both the bilingual and the non-bilingual classes were tested using a series of computerised diagnostic tests developed by the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at the University of Durham, designed to examine not only children's attainment but also how they learn. It should be noted that the results of the tests cannot be used as a valid comparison of the relative progress of the children in bilingual and non-bilingual classes as, due to the optional nature of the children's placement in bilingual classes or not, it could not be ascertained whether both cohorts had started from the same baseline, therefore no gains or losses in attainment can be reliably assessed. What the test results do show is that the majority of children in both bilingual classes appear to be performing at an age equivalent level at least commensurate with their chronological age, with several children's skills a year to eighteen months in advance of their chronological age, and in two cases over two years in advance. This suggests that there has been no disadvantage to their progress as a result of being in a bilingual class.

### **Conclusions**

The observations showed that the children appeared to be operating successfully and comfortably in the bilingual setting. Interviews with them reinforced how much they enjoyed the experience. Test results show that the majority of children in the bilingual classes are performing at a level corresponding to or in advance of their chronological age. All the parents of the children in the bilingual classes have been contacted with a view to establishing whether they would like their child to continue in the bilingual class. All have responded affirmatively. This suggests that they are satisfied that their children's progress has not been affected by having forty per cent of their learning taking place in Italian. Parents who opted not to place their children in a bilingual

class are also satisfied with their children's progress, although the disruption of early friendship groups was an issue for some.

The children in the bilingual classes appeared to show a great degree of intercultural awareness, adapting easily to the different cultures in the classroom and demonstrating that they had acquired information relating to a variety of aspects of Italian culture. Although there appears to be no empirical academic research to support the development of non-bilingual children's wider intercultural awareness as a result of the existence of a partial immersion class, it may be that that may occur by osmosis as partial immersion becomes established over time.

The senior management, the Italian teacher and the class teachers of the Junior School have put an immense amount of energy into ensuring that the children's wellbeing and academic progress is at the heart of the project and are to be commended for their efforts in ensuring such an innovative project has gone ahead so smoothly. The project appears to be very successful and the school should be proud of being the first in Scotland to take the step of offering their pupils the opportunity to take part in bilingual partial immersion education in Italian. This model of partial immersion could be used as an effective model for other schools wishing to offer their children a similar programme of bilingual learning, as it could lend itself to other languages if desired.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the findings, we make the following recommendations:

- The school should continue to work in close collaboration with the Italian Consulate to ensure resources are available in order to sustain and develop partial bilingual immersion in Italian.
- The school should continue to offer parents the opportunity to place their children in an Italian bilingual partial immersion class in subsequent years.
- The children in the present bilingual classes should continue to receive partial immersion education, at least until the end of their primary education.
- The school should seek to set aside dedicated planning time for the class teachers and Italian teacher(s) to prepare effectively for the delivery of topic

work. At the moment, this is done informally due to the demands of the teachers' timetables. Perhaps with the arrival of a second Italian teacher there may be room for more flexibility, so that one hour per week, say, can be given over to planning.

- The forty per cent of extra time available to class teachers as a result of their class's involvement in the project should be used effectively to develop and take forward initiatives which will be beneficial to the whole school.
- Senior management and teachers in the Junior School should continue to monitor the attainment of the children in the bilingual classes to ensure parity with the attainment of the children in the non-bilingual classes.
- The school should explore the possibilities of a link with at least one primary school in the network of Jesuit schools to which it belongs so that e-twinning and/or video conferences can be set up to give the bilingual pupils the opportunity to communicate with real Italian children.
- Class teachers and the wider school staff should be encouraged to spend some of their personal development time learning basic Italian so that they may better support the Italian teacher and enhance the children's learning.

Although not a recommendation, we would like to make the following suggestion:

- The school may wish to have video evidence of a bilingual class lesson for parents who have expressed an interest in placing their child in a bilingual partial immersion class.

Notes on the authors of the report.

Hazel Crichton is Lecturer in Modern Languages in the Faculty of Education at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests include bilingual education and the use of the target language within a communicative approach to teaching and learning modern languages

Brian Templeton is Reader in Teaching, Learning and Assessment of Modern Languages in the Faculty of Education at the University of Glasgow. He is also National Leader for Modern Languages in Curriculum for Excellence. His research interests include policy, planning and assessment in modern languages.

References:

- Cloud, N. Genesee, F., & Hamayan, E. (2000). *Dual language instruction: A handbook for enriched education*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Crichton, H. (2006) Vienna Bilingual Schools Programme. *Scottish Languages Review*, 14 <http://www.strath.ac.uk/scilt/slr/iss/2006/14/#d.en.245825>
- Fortune, Tara W., & Tedick, Diane J. (2003) What Parents Want To Know about Foreign Language Immersion Programs *ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics*
- Johnson, R.K. & Swain, M. (1997). *Immersion education: International perspectives*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnstone, R.M. (2000) *Immersion in second language at school: Evidence from international research*. University of Stirling: Scottish CILT
- Johnstone, R.M., Stradling, B. MacNeil, M., Harlen, W., Thorpe, G. (1999) *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic-medium Primary Education in Scotland*. University of Stirling: Scottish CILT
- Krashen, S. & McField, G. (2005) What works? Reviewing the latest evidence on bi-lingual education. *Language Learner* 1, 2: 7-10
- Lanza, E. (1997). *Language mixing in infant bilingualism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sorace, A (2009) Two are better than one. *Children in Scotland* 4: 14-15. <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/>
- Sorace, A & Ladd, R. (no date) Raising bi-lingual children. Leaflet commissioned by the *Linguistic Society of America*. [http://www.lsadc.org/info/ling-faqs-biling\\_child.cfm](http://www.lsadc.org/info/ling-faqs-biling_child.cfm)

Swain, M. & Lapkin S.(1993) Active bilingualism and French immersion education: the roles of language proficiency and literacy. In A. Reynolds (Ed.) *Bilingualism, multiculturalism and second language learning. The McGill conference in honour of Wallace E. Lambert*. Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum

Van de Craen, P., Mondt, K. Allain, L., & Gao, Y. (2007) Why and How CLIL works: An Outline for a CLIL theory in U.Smit and C. Dalton-Puffer (Eds) *Vienna Working Papers*, 16, 3: 70-78  
[http://www.factworld.info/austria/paper/Views\\_0703.pdf](http://www.factworld.info/austria/paper/Views_0703.pdf)

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wertsch, J.V. & Sohmer, R. (1995). Vygotsky on learning and development. *Human Development*. 38: 332-37