

Language and the Classroom: Assessing the Impact Of Elsp Materials in Post-Primary Language Support and Mainstream Subject Classrooms

Zachary Lyons

E-mail: lyonsdz@tcd.ie

Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)

Abstract

The concept of successfully integrating newcomer students with ESL needs into the language of schooling and the mainstream post-primary school curriculum is multi-dimensional, involving the successful integration of cultural adjustment, language and learning skills and lexico-grammatical development. Within the Irish post-primary school context the successful teaching of Academic English derived from subject textbooks and examination papers plays an important role in the integration of all students not just ESL learners - as it informs the language of instruction, of communication and of assessment within the classroom.

During 2007-2010, the English Language Support Programme (the Trinity Immigration Initiative, Trinity College Dublin) developed and exploited a comprehensive corpus of post-primary curricular subject textbooks, teacher guidelines and examination papers. This open corpus of nearly 5.2 million words permits a focus to be directed on subject-specific language which, in turn, has informed the development of a large array of materials designed to support teaching and learning at each of the CEFR A1-B2 Benchmarks. The mediation of these materials to teachers and students alike is web-based.

This paper reports on the impact of this array of materials in post-primary ESL and mainstream subject and learning support classrooms. As evidenced by internet usage metrics, teacher feedback and classroom observation, the units are currently being widely used. A survey of 18 language support teachers, 2 learning support and 8 mainstream subject teachers in 14 schools shows the role the materials have played both in the linguistic development of the teacher and in the linguistic, functional literacy and metacognitive development of the learner. The data suggest that the materials have greatly facilitated access to the Academic English of the curriculum to the point that they are commonly used by special educational needs (SEN) and learning support teachers who work with learners displaying other learning needs.

Instructional findings and implications for the post-primary curriculum will be discussed and challenges for the future development and use of the materials will be outlined.