

Murphy, Noreen, 1997, *The changing emphasis in Irish Language syllabuses at Junior Cycle for certificate examinations. A teacher's view*

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

This study examines the changing emphasis in Irish language syllabus at Junior Cycle level in post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. The present Junior Certificate syllabus for Irish was introduced in 1989. This curriculum marks a major shift in the teaching and learning of Irish from a grammatical and structural approach to a communicative approach. The study involves a review of the position of the Irish language in schools since 1922, and the development of the communicative approach to language teaching. It also undertakes a critical review of the Junior Certificate syllabus for Irish and presents a quantitative case study of teachers' perspectives on the implementation of this syllabus.

Chapter One reviews the development of the Irish language as an academic subject in the school curriculum. The content of the post-primary syllabus since 1922 to the present day is outlined. Chapter Two traces the moves which prompted a change in syllabi in general and the changes in the Irish syllabus in particular. The origins and historical background to the communicative approach to language teaching and learning are traced. The chapter concludes with a focused review and criticism of the Junior Certificate syllabus for Irish.

Chapter Three deals with the case study. The research instrument, a questionnaire, is used to elicit teachers' views regarding syllabus content in comparison to previous syllabi. The questionnaire focuses on three fundamental areas: syllabus content, the role of the teacher, and resources and in-service training. Chapter Four is concerned with the analysis of the questionnaires. Criteria for analysis are established and the questionnaires are then analysed according to these criteria. A substantial majority of teachers reported positive pupil attitude to learning Irish. Teachers expressed high levels of satisfaction with the content of the syllabus. Implementation constraints reported by teachers included a lack of an official oral examination, inadequate in-service courses, and a scarcity of suitable authentic materials.

In Chapter Five, conclusions and recommendations are presented. The major theoretical and empirical conclusions are discussed. The implications of the study for the teaching and learning of Irish in the education system are presented. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research on the teaching and learning of Irish as Junior Certificate level.